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# LIFE OF JOHN WILKES

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

**SOME DISTINGUISHED VICTIMS  
OF THE SCAFFOLD**

**THE STORY OF A BEAUTIFUL  
DUCHESS**

**LADIES FRAIL AND FAIR**

**A GENTLEMAN OF THE ROAD**





LIFE OF JOHN WILKES  
BY HORACE BLEACKLEY



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## INTRODUCTION

THE materials for a biography of John Wilkes are as adequate as those concerning any other politician of the eighteenth century. The Wilkes MSS. in the British Museum occupy two dozen volumes or more—*i.e.* Add. MSS. 30865-88—and contain many thousand letters written by the demagogue and his numerous correspondents. Some of these have been printed in Almon's *Life of Wilkes* and more in *The Letters, from the Year 1774 to the Year 1796, of John Wilkes, Esq., addressed to his Daughter*, but the majority are still unpublished. The Diary and the Address Books in particular are invaluable for biographical purposes.

In addition to these documents there are many other papers in the Manuscript Room of the British Museum relating to Wilkes. Add. MSS. 22131-2 contain many hundred pages about his trial. There are the innumerable references cited by Mr. J. M. Rigg in his excellent monograph in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The Hardwicke and the Newcastle MSS. are full of letters dealing with the case of Wilkes.

In the Guildhall Library there is a large *dossier*, bound in three volumes, including many invaluable records of the prosecution of the agitator, which, as far as I am aware, have never been examined previously.

The MSS. sold at Sotheby's on August 1, 1913, now in the possession of the author, throw much light upon the boyhood of Wilkes. They embrace over a hundred of his autograph letters and many others written by his mother,



his brothers, and his sister. Much of his early married life, too, is revealed in his correspondence with John Dell, a copy of which is in the possession of Mrs. Lee of Hartwell. Some extracts from this were published in Robert Gibb's *History of Aylesbury*. In Mr. A. M. Broadley's collection, also, there are many Wilkes' autographs.

A full account of the proceedings against the demagogue may be seen in the Home Office Papers at the Public Record Office. Here also in the Crown Rolls, Court of King's Bench, is a copy of the Information brought against him by the Attorney-General for publishing *The North Briton* and the "Essay on Woman."

A very accurate biography of Wilkes could be written from the information in contemporary newspapers alone, few men having been so voluminously paragraphed in the press. One annual file at least of a daily journal has been examined for the purpose of this biography from the year 1760 until the patriot's death, and at important periods several others have been collated. In like manner all the principal magazines of the day have been explored.

For the rest, it is almost impossible to turn over any printed book of memoirs or collection of letters, written during the latter half of the eighteenth century, that does not contain some reference to the famous agitator. It may be said without exaggeration that his life is a history of the period.

My thanks are due to Sir George Sherston Baker and to the director of the Aylesbury Museum for permission to make use of the various portraits in this volume; also to Mrs. Lee of Hartwell, Col. Prideaux-Brune, the late Major Molineux-Montgomerie of Garboldisham, and the late Mr. A. M. Broadley of Bridport for allowing me to inspect their MSS., and to Mr. Henry Farnham Burke, Norroy King of Arms, for the copy of the Wilkes pedigree at Heralds' College.

I am obliged to the late Sir Arthur Liberty and to Dr. Stewart for allowing me the privilege of consulting various old deeds relating to the Prebendal House at Aylesbury. To the following ladies and gentlemen, who have sent information of various kinds, I am also extremely grateful : viz. to Constance, Lady Russell, Mr. Samuel Pepys Cockerell, Mr. John Lane, Mr. Thomas Seccombe, Signor Aldo Ravà of Venice, Signor Dino Mantovani of Turin, Signors E. Orioli and Ludovico Frati of Bologna, Signor Salvatore di Giacomo of Naples, MM. Hector Fleischmann, R. Veze, and Charles Imaran of Paris, Mr. Hutton of Naples, Mr. Tage E. Bull of Copenhagen, Messrs. Thomas Field, C. G. Watkins, Percy A. Wright, Edwin Hollis and Dr. T. G. Parrott of Aylesbury, Mr. Albert Matthews of Boston, U.S.A., Mr. V. L. Oliver, Dr. R. R. Sharpe, Mr. John F. Wilkes, Mr. Eric Watson, Mr. A. Goddard, Mr. J. Rogers, Mr. J. M. Bullock, Mr. Lewis Melville ; and I beg to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Miss Constance White of 89 Fellow's Road, Hampstead, who has done work for me at the British Museum and at the Public Record Office. I must also acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Harold Cox for much valuable criticism.

—• Last, but not least, I am greatly indebted to Mr. Clement Shorter, by whose persuasion I was induced to write this book, for his advice and encouragement during the progress of the work.

HORACE BLEACKLEY.



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# LIFE OF JOHN WILKES



# LIFE OF JOHN WILKES

## CHAPTER I

### THE BOYHOOD OF A YOUNG WHIG

1725-1746

**A**T the northern end of St. John's Lane, Clerkenwell, a narrow, tortuous thoroughfare lined with mean houses, the road is spanned by St. John's Gate, the ancient portal that formed the grand south entrance to the Priory of the Knights of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England. Through the old archway lies a broad, irregular square, the site of the great courtyard of the monastic pile, at the farther end of which, a hundred years ago, close to St. John's Church, stood a solid red brick mansion, approached by a paved area with iron gates. In the early days of the eighteenth century this house was the home of Israel Wilkes, a prosperous malt distiller, whose place of business adjoined his residence and extended back into St. John's Street.<sup>1</sup> This Israel Wilkes was the son of Edward Wilkes, an illiterate yeoman of Albrighton in the county of Shropshire, who, coming up to London in the year 1681 to seek his fortune, had been bound apprentice to a distiller named Samuel Wight. It was not long before Israel Wilkes had begun to rise in the world. Within the space of ten years he was the proprietor of a small business of his own at Southwark,

<sup>1</sup> *History of Clerkenwell*, W. J. Pinks, p. 314; *Old and New London*, Ed. Walford, ii. 324; *London Past and Present*, H. B. Wheatley, ii. 313-16; *The Squares of London*, E. B. Chancellor, p. 378.

and being thrifty and shrewd and a sturdy, active workman, capable of driving his own dray as well as filling his own vats, he was able at last to purchase the house and distillery in Clerkenwell.<sup>1</sup> About the year 1724 he seems to have removed to a country residence at the New River Head, Islington, a few hundred yards away on the fringe of the town, leaving his only son Israel in charge of the business and in possession of the old home in St. John's Square.<sup>2</sup>

Though cast in a less coarse mould, Israel Wilkes, junior, had inherited much of his father's commercial ability, and the distillery continued to prosper under his management. A jovial person with a keen sense of humour, lavish and somewhat prone to ostentation, it was his ambition to rise in the social scale, while his natural inclination led him to seek the companionship of men of culture and wit.<sup>3</sup> In his marriage he showed the world wisdom characteristic of most of his race. Sarah Heaton, who became his wife about the year 1720, was the daughter of a prosperous tanner in Bermondsey, a fellow-parishioner of his father in the early days of his business career in Southwark. The Heatons, like the elder Wilkes, were Nonconformists, and the bride brought to her husband the rich property of Hoxton Square, where a large colony of prominent dissenters had long been established. Moreover, two of Israel's sisters, Martha and Deborah, married eminent physicians of Nonconformist stock, James Douglas and Robert Nesbitt respectively, the former of whom was a close friend of the celebrated Dr. Meade, which helped to bring

<sup>1</sup> The Fiske pedigree at Herald's College, *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 4, 1765; *Notes and Queries*, 3rd series, iii. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Clerkenwell Rate Books, cf. *History of Clerkenwell*, W. J. Pinks, p. 453. The rate books and the registers of St. James's Church show that many persons of the name of Wilkes were resident in Clerkenwell all through the seventeenth century.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of John Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 3; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 11; ii. 42. *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 17; *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxviii., Part I, p. 77.

the Wilkes family more closely within the pale of the dissenting community in spite of the character of their business.<sup>1</sup>

Like many a great heiress, Mrs. Israel Wilkes, the younger, does not appear to have been a beauty, but she was a person of much strength of will, good-humoured and tolerant as a rule, with a hot temper that was easily aroused by contradiction. To her children she was the most affectionate of parents, but exacted their implicit obedience, taking an absorbing interest in the smallest matter that concerned them. Over her husband she was supposed to hold absolute sway, but she was a devoted wife to him, having a sincere affection also for his mother. While she was as anxious as he was to attract a coterie of distinguished friends, her most intimate acquaintances were those of her own faith. Though not a bigot, she had a deep sense of religion, being faithful to her particular denomination, and a regular attendant at the meeting-house. Intensely loyal to her family circle, she was always ready to take up the quarrel when one for whom she cared had suffered an affront. In every respect she was a strong, masterful woman, a suitable mother of a great man.<sup>2</sup>

Two children were born to Israel Wilkes and his lady within the first two years of their marriage. Sally, the elder, seems to have been a frail creature from the first, and her health was always delicate, but she was a gentle, patient soul, devoted to her parents. Israel, the second child, was healthy and robust, and grew up to be an easy, good-tempered sluggard of sound morals, with little intellect or strength of purpose. Three more years elapsed before

<sup>1</sup> Wills of Israel Wilkes, senior and junior, 286 Seymond and 40 Cheslyn. Pedigree of Sir George Sherston Baker, Bart., cf. *History of Aylesbury*, Robert Gibbs, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> Will of Sarah Wilkes, 53 Webster; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 2; Wilkes MSS. (Brit. Mus.) *passim*; *True Briton*, Dec. 30, 1797. The letters of Mrs. Wilkes in the Wilkes MSS., sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913, throw much light upon her character.

there was another birth in the bright, spacious house in St. John's Square, and then upon a Sunday, the 17th of October, 1725, O.S., Mrs. Sarah Wilkes presented her husband with a second boy, who was destined to become one of the most famous men of his generation.<sup>1</sup> The new baby, whom they christened John, after an opulent great uncle, was remarkably ill-favoured, having a large prominent jaw and a flattened nose, with a cast in the eyes—beyond all question a child of incomparable ugliness. But it was soon evident that little John Wilkes had a brave spirit, while as he advanced in years his cheery good-temper and charm of manner won the hearts of all who knew him.

From the first he appears to have been the father's favourite.<sup>2</sup> Possibly the ambitious distiller was shrewd enough to perceive that a boy possessing Sarah Wilkes's strength of character as well as the grit and energy of the old grand-sire who used to drive the brewer's dray, was likely to make his mark in the world. Another bond of union between the pair was the child's keen sense of humour, with which Israel Wilkes loved to play in his usual boisterous fashion. A well-known anecdote throws a light upon their relationship.

"Jack, have you got a purse?" the father one day inquired.

"No, sir," replied the boy.

"I am sorry for that, Jack," was the mischievous answer. "If you had, I should have given you some money to put in it."

Little John Wilkes, always eager for cash, took care to obtain a purse as soon as possible.

"Jack," remarked the father, when he heard of the new possession, "have you got a purse?"

"Yes, sir."

<sup>1</sup> Pedigree of Sir George Sherston Baker, Bart. *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 30, 1769; *Annual Register* (1797), p. 370; *Morning Herald*, Dec. 30, 1797.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,865, f. 13.

"I am glad of it. If you had not had a purse I would have given you one."<sup>1</sup>

And the son was as ready to laugh at the joke as his father, loving a jest as well as he did, knowing also that he had merely to declare that he was short of pocket-money in order to obtain a fresh supply.

Yet, although he was much indulged, the religious training of young John Wilkes was as stern and puritanical as that of any little Nonconformist of his day. Indeed, an odour of sanctity seems to surround his boyhood. A Sunday-born child, brought up next door to a church on the site of an old priory, with a pious mother who insisted that her children should accompany her to the Highgate Meeting every Sunday to listen to doctrines of the most rigid Calvinistic severity, whose nearest relations were all strict dissenters, ordering their lives by Bible rules, every circumstance of his early environment united to form him into a devout and God-fearing man.<sup>2</sup> Still, amidst these austere influences there was a considerable element of worldliness, for the household of the laughter-loving distiller, who was never so rigorous a Sabbatarian as his wife, was the scene of lavish hospitality all the week through.<sup>3</sup>

For the first nine years of his boyhood John Wilkes remained at home in the sunlit, drowsy old courtyard. The ancient gateway that stood opposite his father's house at the southern boundary of the square blocked the narrow entrance, and few sounds disturbed the tranquillity except the dreary bell of St. John's Church—a dismal pile on the east side—or the rumble of the chariot of some wealthy neighbour, for the place was a favourite residence of the upper-middle class. Israel Wilkes, also, was the owner of a coach and four, in which the family were accustomed to drive on a Sunday to the Southwood Lane Chapel on

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 3; *Annual Necrology for 1797-8*.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxiii., Part I, p. 77.



Highgate Hill, or pay state visits to the picturesque home of the old grandfather on the borders of the New River Head reservoir.<sup>1</sup> During most of this period John had two more playmates, for his brother Heaton was born on the 9th of February, 1727, and his sister Mary about twenty months later. The former was a meek, lovable child, but the girl, who was remarkably plain, soon developed into a self-assertive little shrew, with as bitter a tongue as her mother.

In the year 1734 John Wilkes was sent with his brothers to a boarding-school at Hertford. It was an academy of some celebrity, kept by John Worsley, a man of considerable erudition and a kind, vigilant tutor, who watched over his pupils both in work and playtime with infinite care. The school building was a remarkable structure, known as the Tower House, standing in the wall that surrounded the Castle, and approached from the moat by a steep flight of steps. Here the boy remained for five years, gaining a fair knowledge of Latin and Greek, for his master was a fine classical scholar, and making many friends among his companions. Apparently John Worsley regarded him with especial fondness, writing a most affectionate letter to him after he had left the school, in which he spoke of his "generous sentiments and that love of letters, which I myself beheld the first dawns of, and no mean advancement in, with so much pleasure," adding, "Go on, dear youth, and prosper in your noble pursuits." During the whole of his childhood John Wilkes seems to have won the esteem of everyone whom he met.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving the Tower House at the close of the year 1739, the boy was placed under the care of the Rev. Matthew Leeson, of Thame in Oxfordshire, a Presbyterian clergy-

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 4; *Dictionary of Authors*, S. A. Allibone; *History of Hertford*, L. Turnor, pp. 49-50; *Dict. Nat. Biog.* under Israel Worsley; *History of Bucks*, G. Lipcombe, ii. 37; Mr. W. B. Gerish in *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, iv. 474.

man, who took a few private pupils. The change was an unfortunate one, for the new tutor was a superficial pedagogue sixty years of age, whose brain was enshrouded by the mists of theology, a morbid sophist who had interpreted the speculations of Samuel Clarke and William Whiston in a manner undreamt of probably by either of those estimable divines. According to the critical John, who laughed at his pedantry, "he was continually poaching in dull volumes for some new heresy." Finally he became an adherent of Arianism, and announced in the conventicle to his startled flock that he was a confirmed deist, repudiating all their cherished beliefs with reference to original sin and justification by faith. After this ultimatum his resignation was inevitable, and a little later, when young Wilkes had been living with him for about a year, exasperated by the reproaches of his late congregation, he broke up his school and quitted the town.<sup>1</sup>

Powerful friends soon came to his aid, regarding him as the victim of persecution, and in the summer of 1741 he removed his establishment to the parsonage house in Aylesbury, which a certain Mrs. John Meade, the rich widow of a tradesman who had formerly conducted a prosperous business at London Bridge, placed at his disposal at a low rental.

Oddly enough, the genial Israel Wilkes, influenced perhaps by his father, remained a warm admirer of the dreary presbyter, and when Mr. Leeson left Thame he allowed his son to follow him to the new seminary. Between the Meade and the Wilkes families there had been an intimacy of long standing, for they had many friends in common, and when the young man arrived in Aylesbury he received a warm welcome from Mrs. Meade, who lived with her daughter Mary in the Prebendal House.

<sup>1</sup> *John Wilkes, An Unfinished Autobiograph*, Harrow, 1888, pp. 9-10; Add. MS. 30,865, ff. 13, 15; *Autobiography of Alex. Carlyle*, p. 168; Letters of Matthew Leeson in the Wilkes MSS., sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913.

beside the parish church.<sup>1</sup> Miss Meade was a quiet, colourless creature, with some claim to good looks, but little charm of manner, amenable and kind at heart, yet, being an only child, much spoilt by over-indulgence, and indolent to the point of selfishness. Still, she had the advantage of being a great heiress, for both her 'parents came of a wealthy Buckinghamshire stock, and very soon Mrs. Meade and Sarah Wilkes began to whisper that John and Mary in after years would make a very suitable match.

For the present, however, Israel Wilkes was intent upon giving his favourite son the education of a gentleman, handicapped though he had been by the family prejudices against a public school and the university. Being an orthodox Whig, devoted to the principles of "the glorious Revolution," he decided to send the young man to the famous seat of learning patronised by William of Orange at Leyden, where he would have the advantage of meeting many youthful Englishmen of rank and wealth.<sup>2</sup> So, a few weeks before he reached his nineteenth birthday, after pursuing his studies at Aylesbury for more than two years, John Wilkes went over to the Dutch university, accompanied by Hungerford Bland, the son of a Yorkshire baronet. In spite of the vicissitudes of his education he had become a scholar of some ability, with a great love of metaphysics, in addition to which he was a talker of much wit and originality. The Rev. Mr. Leeson attended him in the capacity of watch-dog, with the title of tutor, a lucrative arrangement for that inefficient person, who seems to have been no more successful as a schoolmaster than he had been as a minister of the Gospel. Greatly to his credit, he prevailed upon Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes to ascertain

\* <sup>1</sup> *John Wilkes, an Unfinished Autobiography*, p. 10; *Aylesbury Rate Books; History of Aylesbury*, Robert Gibbs, p. 216; *Matthew Leeson's Letters in Wilkes MSS.*, sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Horne Tooke*, Alex. Stephens, i. 89.

whether his companionship would be agreeable to their son before accepting the appointment.<sup>1</sup>

It was early in September, 1744, when they arrived at Leyden, a dreamy old city, with wide shady streets and lonely squares, intersected by a network of canals bordered by trees, and on the 8th of the month John Wilkes was formally enrolled a member of the great university.<sup>2</sup> Shortly afterwards he made a short tour of the Netherlands with his tutor, wandering as far south as Liege in Belgium, *en route* to Spa, the most fashionable watering-place in Europe. While sitting at dinner in a country inn the day after they had left the first-named town, they fell into conversation with an elderly Scotsman, named Andrew Baxter, who was travelling with his pupil, Mr. Hay of Drummelgier, along the same road. To his great delight, the studious Wilkes discovered that his new acquaintance was steeped in philosophy, a severe critic of Locke, a witty and genial disputant, who was fully persuaded that "when Bishop Berkeley said there was no matter 'twas no matter what he said," just the sort of person, in young John's opinion, to expose the sophistries of the tiresome Mr. Lecson. The attraction being mutual, the four tourists proceeded on their way together, and after remaining at Spa for a few days, which Baxter seems to have occupied in expatiating at full length to his young admirer upon the errors of continental philosophers with regard to "Immateriality" while they walked together in the Capuchins' garden, they visited Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne, sailing back to Holland down the Rhine. At the end of the brief tour Wilkes had completely won the heart of the Scottish metaphysician, who paid him the compliment of composing a dialogue named "Histor," in which he was the chief interlocutor. "It is my greatest

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Letson's Letters in Wilkes MSS., sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Index of English Students at Leyden University*, E. Peacock, p. 104.

endeavour," declared Baxter, in a letter from Utrecht a few months later, "to make you speak and think with as much wit and sprightliness, with as much solidity and good sense as you deserve . . . you are the Hero of my Dialogue. . . ." Until his death, six years afterwards, the relationship between the philosopher and the young man was that of master and disciple.<sup>1</sup>

When John Wilkes had been at Leyden for a year, during which time he managed to gain some reputation as a conversationalist, and, encouraged by his success, aspired to be a "fine gentleman and a man of taste," three of his compatriots, who were destined to become famous in after life, arrived in the city. There were already a score of English students in residence, but the lectures, with few exceptions, were of no great distinction, and the Dutch university had little value from an educational point of view, except for its cosmopolitan society and the opportunity of acquiring a foreign language. For the eldest of the new comers, one William Dowdeswell, a slow, laborious person, who became a famous but futile Chancellor of the Exchequer in a famous and futile ministry, Wilkes for a time appears to have entertained a great regard, which the faithful fellow, a sincere admirer of his vivacious companion, reciprocated most heartily.<sup>2</sup>

Another of the three freshmen also became his friend. One evening as he strolled along the banks of the Rhine outside the city walls he was introduced to a grave and dignified youth, with the head and features of a Greek god, named Alexander Carlyle—the future leader of the Broad Church party in Scotland—with whom he was soon on terms of intimacy, for since his acquaintance with "Immateriality" Baxter he had always been fond of the company of North Britons.<sup>3</sup> The youngest of the trio,

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, ff. 7-10, 13, 15, 17, 22, 23, 27, 29; *Letters between the Duke of Grafton . . . &c., and John Wilkes*, pp. 161-6; *Illustrations of Lit. Hist.*, J. Nichols, iv. 74-6.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography of Alex. Carlyle*, p. 168.

however, who was no less a personage than Charles Townshend, the grandson of the great statesman, was never his confidant. Between the two there must always have been a certain rivalry, the natural antagonism of keen wits and brilliant talkers. And although the Clerkenwell boy was the life and soul of every company where the other was not present, he was no match for the handsome young aristocrat with the lustrous eyes and nervous, mobile lips, who already possessed an eloquence that was to make him the equal of the greatest orators of all time, and whose boundless store of animal spirits, bubbling over with jest and anecdote or revelling in a burst of mimicry, never failed to keep the whole table in a roar.<sup>1</sup>

At intervals, when the society of his tutor grew intolerable, Wilkes paid a visit to his friend Andrew Baxter, who continued to reside at Utrecht, some thirty miles distant, with his two Scottish pupils, Lord Blantyre and Hay of Drummelgier. The philosopher, however, was favourably impressed with the old clergyman, whose inquisitiveness probably made him an excellent listener, recommending his young disciple "to follow Mr. Leeson's advice always," and assuring him that no man ever "had a better counsellor." But many of the Leyden students, who had grown weary of the ex-Presbyterian's discourses on the Arian creed, shared Wilkes's opinion, and his most intimate friend, a rich young German, named Paul Heinrich d'Holbach, was the bitterest of them all, disliking the tutor from the first and declaring him to be a cross, peevish fellow.<sup>2</sup> Under the influence of d'Holbach, who was an atheist of great personal charm, with considerable power of intellect, the religious convictions of John Wilkes began to undergo a change. Often, when in a mood of mischief, he had been in the habit of asserting that he did not believe.

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography of Alex. Carlyle*, p. 170; Ed. Peacock's *Index of English Students*, p. 99; cf. *Works of John Gregory* i. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, ff. 8, 18.

in the Bible in order to shock Mr. Leeson, who strove vainly to make him an Arian; and probably, though he may not have realised the fact, he was speaking less in jest than earnest. For some time, and certainly during the remainder of his sojourn in Holland, the theism of Andrew Baxter was too deeply rooted in his mind to allow him to become a sceptic, but the arguments of his German friend were strong enough to shatter most of the doctrines that he had inherited from his Presbyterian ancestors.

At the beginning of July in 1746, after he had been in residence at Leyden for a year and ten months, broken by a brief visit to England in the previous summer, Wilkes returned to his home in St. John's Square.<sup>1</sup> During his absence the old grandfather of the New River Head had been laid to rest in the Nonconformist burial-place at Bunhill Fields, and the second Israel Wilkes was now the sole proprietor of the Clerkenwell distillery. The favourite son received a warm welcome from his parents, who no doubt were proud to observe the elegance of his manners and the assurance of his address. It would have caused them much uneasiness had they known that, in spite of the vigilance of Mr. Leeson, he had managed to earn a well-deserved reputation for profligacy.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, ff. 8, 11, 15.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SQUIRE OF AYLESBURY

1746-1754

ENVIRONMENT, which usually has a more important influence than heredity in the evolution of the young, attains its result just as frequently through antagonism as by imitation. Like many a youth whose religious training had been austere, John Wilkes seems to have grown up with a natural mistrust of dogma, while, untrue to the commercial traditions of his race, his thoughts were bent upon social aspirations and a life of pleasure. Most of his youthful experiences appear to have served as a contrast, teaching him that all things appertaining to his boyhood were undesirable, and the slight acquaintance that he had made with the polite world only served to whet his appetite.

Apparently, his father was content that he should become the gentleman of the family. No profession was suggested for him, and soon after his twenty-first birthday—to celebrate which he had been brought home from Leyden—his parents began to pursue their schemes to provide him with a rich wife. Mrs. Israel Wilkes and her daughters had joined the communion of Carter Lane Chapel, where Mrs. John Meade of Aylesbury came to worship when she was staying at her London house in Red Lion Court, and the old friendship between the two ladies was as warm as ever.<sup>1</sup> The Meade family had been people of consequence in the county of Buckinghamshire for many generations.

<sup>1</sup> Registers of Carter Lane Chapel; *John Wilkes, an Unfinished Autobiography*, p. 10.



Sprung originally from Bragenham in Soulbury, some of the members of its younger branches had gained wealth and distinction in law, medicine, and commerce. A large portion of their riches had descended to Mrs. Meade's only daughter Mary, the indolent young woman whose acquaintance John Wilkes had made four years previously while living with Mr. Leeson at the Parsonage House. The fortune left to her by her father had been augmented by a large inheritance from her uncle, William Meade, who bequeathed to her the reversion of the Manor of Aylesbury, and she was also acknowledged as the future heiress of her uncle, Richard Sherbrooke of Chenies, a chimney-corner dotard, who had lived with her mother for some years.<sup>1</sup>

When Israel Wilkes suggested to his son that his fortune would be made if he could manage to win this opulent bride, the ambitious youth seems to have agreed with his father without hesitation, posting down into Buckinghamshire at the first opportunity to urge his suit. From his letters to Paul d'Holbach it would appear that he had persuaded himself, or desired to persuade his acquaintances, that his commonplace mistress was an acknowledged beauty, and, as though anxious to disavow all mercenary intentions, he wished to be regarded as a woeful lover, infatuated by her blandishments.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that Miss Meade's buxom charms and country freshness made him overlook her lack of intellect, but it is incredible that he can have persuaded himself that his courtship was inspired by affection. Amidst the solid comforts of the Prebendal House self-delusion was impossible, and he was well aware that the woman of his choice would have found no favour in his eyes had she not been the lady of the Manor of Aylesbury. Being a most fastidious admirer of beauty in women, he realised the

<sup>1</sup> Will of William Meade [Botton 12]. Cf. *History of Aylesbury*, R. Gibbs, pp. 316-17.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSG. 30,867, ff. 14, 18, 20.



2

JOHN WILKES

*From a drawing by Richard Lortie in the National Portrait Gallery*



sacrifice that he was making in obeying his father's wishes. It was "a sacrifice," as he confessed in later years, "to Plutus, not to Venus."<sup>1</sup>

Poor Mary Meade, whose spinsterhood seemed likely to endure in spite of her riches, was soon conquered by her impetuous suitor. For a short time indeed the quiet household at the Aylesbury Manor seems to have looked askance at the volatile youth, who, instead of the modest young cit, as they had seen him last, appeared to be transformed into one of the pretty fellows from the fashionable end of the town. The splendour of his dress and the sprightliness of his talk perhaps aroused misgivings in the mind of the heiress that this brilliant boy would harmonise strangely with her humdrum surroundings and tranquil ways. Yet the persuasive Wilkes, in his cheery, masterful style, had little difficulty in sweeping aside the apprehensions of both mother and daughter. The charm of his conversation made them forget that he was ugly, for, as they listened with delight to the endless stream of wit and humour that poured from his lips, his evil squinting eyes seemed to soften and his hard, obstinate mouth to grow tender and kind. It was his boast that it "took him only half an hour to talk away his face," while he often declared in jest that he could beat the handsomest fellow in England in a contest for a lady's favours if he had a fair start on account of his disfigurement.<sup>2</sup> At the end of November, a few weeks after he had attained his majority, he was able to inform his friend d'Holbach that he believed he had won the heart of his innamorata. Early in April he wrote to Andrew Baxter to tell him that he was about "to enter into the happy state of matrimony."<sup>3</sup>

The marriage of John Wilkes and Mary Meade took place

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B., f. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence of Ed. Burke* (1844), i. 376; *Lit. Anecdotes*, E. H. Barker, i. 203; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 227; *Life of F. Reynolds*, i. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, ff. 18, 22.

on the 23rd of May 1747—a month alleged by superstition to be the least auspicious of the year. A licence had been obtained from the Bishop of London, and the ceremony was performed in St. John's Church, Clerkenwell, the dreary place of worship adjoining the bridegroom's home in the quiet old square.<sup>1</sup> The young couple were treated with much generosity by their parents. Israel Wilkes made a gift to his son of real estate, producing an income of three hundred and thirty pounds with a promise of an additional allowance in the future, while Mrs. Meade settled the Prebendal House and the Manor of Aylesbury upon her daughter.<sup>2</sup> It was arranged that the newly married pair should reside at their country seat during the summer, but should spend the winter at Red Lion Court, behind St. Sepulchre's Church, with the bride's mother.

During the next five years John Wilkes combined the life of a rural squire with that of a man of fashion, interested in his estate when at Aylesbury, devoted to the coffee-house when in town. Invariably cheery and good-humoured, he proved a most exemplary husband, always solicitous of his wife's comfort, full of attention for her insipid mother, more than tolerant towards her dull-witted uncle Sherbrooke. Though the gloomy old house in Red Lion Court was an uncongenial home for a young man of his temperament, he had no reason to complain of its dullness, since Mrs. Meade and her daughter, while preferring to remain at the fireside themselves, encouraged him to go into society, and he was free to seek outside diversions when and where he chose. Soon he was surrounded by a merry coterie of kindred spirits, one of whom, a Scottish physician named John Armstrong, who had written much admirable poetry, was able to introduce him to many a famous wit and brilliant writer. Thus, the strange menage in Red Lion Court proved

<sup>1</sup> Registers of St. John's, Clerkenwell; Registers at the Bishop of London's Office.

<sup>2</sup> Will of Israel Wilkes [40 Cheslyn]; Deed in the possession of Dr. Stewart of the Prebendal House, Aylesbury.

a complete success, and Wilkes and his wife, each going their own way, one as amiably selfish as the other, managed to live together very happily. The birth of a daughter, on the 5th of August, 1750, does not appear to have awakened any greater sympathy between the ill-mated pair, for although the father was passionately attached to his little girl from the first, the lethargic mother regarded the child with indifference. The baptism took place three weeks later at Carter Lane Chapel, since Wilkes, who was widely tolerant on all matters of religion, while professing to be a member of the Established Church, regarded it as good policy to gratify his mother-in-law by worshipping at the meeting-house.<sup>1</sup>

In the town of Aylesbury, by reason of his wife's position as lady of the manor, and his own personal magnetism, Wilkes soon became the most popular and influential among the local dignitaries. Taking the greatest pride in his beautiful home, he set to work to extend the boundaries of his property, anxious that it should rank among the notable seats of Buckinghamshire. Standing on the verge of the town beyond the churchyard, from which it was separated by a high stone wall, the Prebendal House—a solid square-built structure—was surrounded by a spacious garden and broad meadows, except on the western side, where several cottages with small plots of ground marred the symmetry of the estate. In the course of time, by degrees and with some difficulty, Wilkes managed to purchase these various lands and tenements, being assisted in the negotiations by his neighbour, John Dell, a gentleman farmer of culture and intelligence, who, fascinated by the wit and bonhomie of the young squire, was content to serve him as a sort of unpaid estate agent.<sup>2</sup> All through his life Wilkes had the knack of engaging the fealty of some

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 17, 20; Registers of Carter Lane Chapel.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell [MSS. of Mrs. Lee of Hartwell]; cf. *History of Aylesbury*, R. Gibbs, pp. 217-24.

faithful satellite. And while increasing the acreage of his demesne, he squandered money lavishly on its improvement, draining and building, forming lawns, shrubberies, and plantations under the superintendence of John Smart, his capable gardener, to the great admiration of the townsfolk, who were allowed to walk through the grounds. In January 1752 he managed to persuade his wife to settle the estate upon him by a deed of gift, which qualified him for a seat upon the county bench, and gave him the power of gratifying the ambitions that were maturing in his mind.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, his public spirit was unbounded. Having been made a magistrate, he performed the duties of his office with the zeal and efficiency that was habitual to him. When in residence at Aylesbury he presided at every vestry, auditing the rate books, and passing the overseer's accounts. None of his colleagues were more constant in their attendance at turnpike meetings and petty sessions. In the course of time he was made a feoffee of the Grammar School and a trustee of the Foundling Hospital. To most of the charities in the town he was a generous subscriber. He presented a new pair of doors to the parish church, where his tall, thin figure was to be seen every Sunday morning in the manor-house pew, and in all parochial matters he took the keenest interest. Next to the faithful Dell, his closest friend was John Stephens, the vicar, who came to smoke a pipe with him on most evenings in the week, while they chattered together upon local affairs. Naturally, his enthusiasm brought its own reward, for the people of Aylesbury regarded the genial John Wilkes as 'one of the finest gentlemen that had ever come to live amongst them.'<sup>2</sup>

Occasionally, the sympathetic Sally would pay a visit to her brother's country house, whence she often wrote to

<sup>1</sup> Deed in the possession of Dr. Stewart. Many of Wilkes's improvements seem to have been carried out some years later. See his correspondence with Dell.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Aylesbury*, R. Gibbs, p. 237; cf. *Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell*; *Aylesbury Rate Books*.

To the Memory

of  
JOHN SMART GARDNER

Who died the 16<sup>th</sup> Day of Nov<sup>r</sup> 1754

. Aged 54 Years

Illum etiam lauri illum etiam flevemur  
Virg

TABLET ERECTED BY WIVES TO HIS GARDENER SMART, ON THE WALL OF FRIENDSHIP HOUSE,  
FACING THE CHURCHYARD, ADELPHI WAY  
BY MARGARET GOSNOLD, 1872





her cousin, Sophy Nesbitt, to tell her the latest news from Aylesbury. "My little niece is the prettiest plaything in the world for me," was her verdict with regard to the five-year-old Polly, "and diverts me ten times more than my squirrels or doormouse"—high praise indeed, since the latter pet was one of the chief joys of her life. "My little niece improves every day," she declared on another occasion. "She talks continually of her dear cousin Sophy and repeats all the pretty things you said to her. She is the present tyrant, and the grave justice, my brother, is not half so absolute in this place as she . . . he writes nothing but warrants for noisy, quarrelsome fellows, and his worship is as solemn all the morning as a city alderman, and as upright, I assure you, as a candle in a socket." From Sally's letter it is evident that the Prebendal House at Aylesbury was a very happy home.<sup>1</sup>

Several changes occurred in the Wilkes family during the first five years of John's married life. In January 1750, to his deep sorrow, his youngest sister, Ann, died of smallpox in the old house in St. John's Square, at the early age of fourteen, and in a letter that he sent soon afterwards to Andrew Baxter, with whom he continued to keep up a constant correspondence, he wrote tenderly of "the great merit and sweetness of temper" of the dead girl.<sup>2</sup> On the 18th of June, 1752, his second sister, Mary, a vitriolic young lady, brisk, bustling, and shrewd, whose youthful freshness gave her some little charm, though she had the Wilkes features, led a meek and opulent "New England merchant" to the altar, a luckless individual named Samuel Storke, who survived his marriage little more than twelve months.<sup>3</sup> A few weeks later, on the 10th of August, John's elder brother, Israel, was married to Miss Elizabeth de Ponthieu

<sup>1</sup> MSS. sold at Sotheby's, Aug. 1, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Registers of St. James's, Clerkenwell* [Harleian Soc.], vol. xx.; Add. MS. 30,867, f. 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Registers of St. James's, Clerkenwell* [Harleian Soc.], vol. xiii.; cf. *Boston Gazette*, Sept. 18, 1753; Add. MS. 30,875, f. 14.

of the parish of St. Mildred, Broad Street, the daughter of "a considerable Manchester agent," with whom the bridegroom had entered into partnership.<sup>1</sup> Yet poor Sally, though craving obviously for matrimony and confessing in her letters to her cousin that she was called an angel by "these men creatures" every day, could not manage to capture a husband.

In addition to the faithful Dell and the tobacco-loving vicar a third warm admirer was added to the exclusive circle of John Wilkes's acquaintances during the early days of his life at Aylesbury. With this friend there was the bond of literary sympathy, for he was a scholar and critic of some ability, Thomas Edwards by name, who lived on his estate at Turrick, near Ellesborough, a few miles away. He was a mild, studious recluse—"a poor solitary hermit" he called himself—having no pleasures besides his books, his garden, and his farm, always happy in the country all the year long, and he often chided Wilkes for running away to seek the gaieties of town when winter drew near. Yet, this demure author, who was usually engaged in writing rhapsodies about the birds and flowers, was able to wield a caustic pen, and his *Canons of Criticism*, a smart attack upon the Rev. William Warburton's edition of Shakespeare, had made the pretentious prelate the laughing stock of the literary world.<sup>2</sup>

After he had been married for five years a change began to take place in Wilkes's habits of life. Already he had become famous as a wit and raconteur, and his circle of friends in London increased with every season. During the whole of each winter he was obliged to seek his pleasures outside his home without the companionship of his wife, and since sympathy alone could have kept him a faithful husband—for, like most of his fellows, he had little respect

<sup>1</sup> *Registers of St. Martin Outwich* [Harleian Soc.], vol. xxxii.; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bodleian MSS. 1011, pp. 25, 79, 93, 120, 143; Add. MS. 30,867, ff. 26, 28, 68, 79.



MARY WILKES (MRS. HAYLEY)

*a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds in the possession of Sir George Sitwell Baker*



for the obligations of matrimony—it was inevitable that his love of gallantry should lead him into innumerable liaisons. In his gay world marital infidelity was regarded as a venial fault. Even poetical John Armstrong, his family doctor, who was a gay rogue, for all his dreamy eyes and dour Scottish features, was ready to chaff him about his illicit amours in the same breath in which he inquired after the health of his good lady ;<sup>1</sup> while Thomas Brewster, the fashionable physician who resided at Bath, where Wilkes began to spend many a festive week, used to write letters to him about his conquests that he could not have shown to his wife.<sup>2</sup> But no whisper of this wickedness was ever heard in Red Lion Court, where the crafty Wilkes continued to live in perfect harmony with his wife and her people.

Of all the friends that surrounded him at this period the most congenial by far was Thomas Potter, the son of a late archbishop and a member of Parliament, a dissolute barrister with a brilliant intellect and an eloquent tongue. A man of considerable wealth, the enjoyment of wine and women was the chief business of his life, but at intervals he turned to politics as a diversion, being acknowledged as one of the best debaters in the House. He had made the acquaintance of Wilkes while canvassing the borough of Aylesbury, which he wished to exchange for his constituency in Cornwall at the next general election, and having many tastes in common, the two witty young reprobates had become the closest of allies. Although he was fond of protesting in chaff that Wilkes had “done everything in his power to destroy his health by strong soups, filthy claret, rakish hours, and bad example,”<sup>3</sup> it is evident from their correspondence that Potter, the superior in riches and position, was the instigator in most of their dissipations. One of his characteristic letters, written to Wilkes from Lisle

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, f. 80 ; 30,875, f. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, ff. 52, 53 ; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B., f. 1.

Street, Leicester Square, on the 19th of October, 1752, throws some light upon the relationship between the two rakes :

“ If you have either religion or morality ; if you have but a pretence to one single social virtue ; if you prefer young women and whores to old women and wives ; if you prefer toying away hours with little Sattin Back to the evening conferences of your Mother-in-law ; if the charms of the Muses are better than the whiffs of tobacco from Mr. Stephens ; if the sprightly notes of the fiddle are preferable to the squalling of your brat ; if life and spirit and wit and humour and gaiety, but above all, if the Heavenly-inspired passion called Lust, have not deserted you and left you a prey to dullness and imbecility, hasten to town that you may take a place in my post-chaise for Bath next Thursday morning, whither I am hurrying from the wisdom of the doctors and midwives, the loathsome bawdy of the nurses, the solemn and hideous lullabies of my Mother-in-law, and the odious yell of a young female Yahoo that thrust herself into the world yesterday.”<sup>1</sup>

Having broken the heart of his first wife, and being notoriously unfaithful to his second, the dissolute politician was restrained by no scruples of conscience from encouraging his friend in his numerous infidelities. “ May Venus and every other duty of pleasure be propitious to you at Tunbridge,” he wrote to Wilkes upon hearing that he was leaving town ; “ should you meet a goddess under the vulgar appellation of Miss Betty Spooner, offer incense to her for my sake . . . you will find her all liveliness and lechery.”<sup>2</sup> All through this correspondence there are similar suggestions, showing that the two friends took a pride in boasting to one another of every breach of their marriage vows. Potter himself was generally believed to

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 62 ; cf. *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 18.

be "the gallant of Warburton's wife"—the favourite niece of Mr. Allen of Prior Park—and in one of his letters from Bath he acknowledges the fact, well aware that Wilkes would be much amused to know that the bombastic prelate with whom his friend Edwards had broken a lance so successfully was in truth an injured husband.<sup>1</sup>

In the intervals of dissipation Potter displayed considerable zeal in advancing his political interests, and being resolved to become member for Aylesbury at the general election of 1754, he spared no pains in wooing the constituency. There was only one means of conciliating the electors, and, aware that every vote in the borough had to be paid for, he was prepared, as Wilkes euphemistically informed his agent, to "talk to our good people in the proper way."<sup>2</sup> It was a great advantage to him that he had gained the assistance of the young lord of the manor, for "seventy or eighty of the principal inhabitants had resolved to adhere together" in supporting a candidate, and these independent tradesmen and innkeepers, while making it their boast that no great noble in the county had any influence with them, were likely enough to listen to the advice of the principal gentleman in the town. Moreover, Wilkes had the power to nominate the returning officer, and his choice had fallen upon the accommodating John Dell.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from all motives of self-interest Potter had a sincere affection for his friend. "The highest pleasure," he declared, "that can be afforded me next to the company of a woman is that of my dear Wilkes."<sup>4</sup> Nor was the advantage of the intimacy by any means wholly on one side. Both in town and in the country Potter was able to gratify Wilkes's social aspirations by giving him valuable

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B., f. 1; Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, Dec. 11, 1753.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Add. MS. 30,876, f. 13.



introductions. Before the end of 1753 he had brought him before the notice of Lord Temple of Stowe, and his brother, George Grenville, each of whom was glad to cultivate his friendship, recognising him as a person of influence in their county. No doubt, too, they were favourably impressed by the witty squire; and perceiving that he was a man of indomitable spirit and restless energy, perhaps also these shrewd politicians foresaw that he was certain to come to the front.

While he was canvassing the electors of Aylesbury on behalf of his friend, Wilkes himself began to be fired with political ambitions. It was suggested by some of his numerous courtiers that he should become Potter's colleague, and rumour actually declared that he was to be the other candidate.<sup>1</sup> Aware that his election would be certain owing to his great popularity, there is little doubt that he would have accepted the invitation of his admirers, but unfortunately someone else was already in the field—an old friend of his, to whom he had long since promised his support. This was a certain John Willes, the son of the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, who had some influence in Aylesbury, his brother having represented the town in the Parliament of 1747. A barrister, like Potter, with a seat in the House already, in many respects he was the antithesis of his colleague, a homely industrious soul, who made no cult of indecency and who was extremely shy in the presence of women. So great was his intimacy with Wilkes that he made him a confidant in his love-affairs, seeking his advice in his courtship of a disdainful lady, whom he wished to make his wife, but to whom he could not summon up courage enough to propose.<sup>2</sup> Although John Wilkes soon grew weary of the banalities of the artless Willes, he kept his promise loyally to support him in his political campaign.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 44; *History of Aylesbury*, R. Gibbs, p. 213.

Many months before the election Potter began to perceive that his fellow-candidate and himself were both poachers on another's domain, and realising that Wilkes would have been member for Aylesbury but for their interposition he did his best to show that he appreciated this self-sacrifice. The compensation that he was able to offer was most flattering to his friend's vanity, for by using his influence with George Grenville he succeeded in getting Wilkes appointed High Sheriff of Buckingham for the year 1754.<sup>1</sup> At the same time he took some pains to find him a suitable constituency, soliciting all the borough-mongering friends of his acquaintance, and at last it seemed as though he had discovered a vacancy at Bristol. It happened, however, that Lord Temple had conceived the idea of sending Wilkes to Berwick-upon-Tweed to oppose the Delaval family, and the squire of Aylesbury, flattered by the attention of his noble patron and pleased at the prospect of a desperate battle, had already promised to contest the borough in the north. Although his family, fearing that his finances were not sufficient to support the expenses of a parliamentary career, endeavoured to dissuade him from the attempt, while Potter, perceiving that his friend was fighting a forlorn hope, prophesied his defeat at the poll, the obstinate Wilkes refused to listen to any remonstrances, and early in April he set off to the border-town to prepare for the election.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Grenville Papers*, i. 102; Add. MS. 30,867, f. 95; Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, Jan. 15, 1754.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 23-4; Add. MSS. 30,867, f. 99; 30,877, f. 1; Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, April 2, 1754; *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 9, 1763.

## CHAPTER III

### POLITICAL AMBITIONS

1754-1757

**A**T the time when John Wilkes was making his first attempt to enter the House of Commons a great crisis had occurred in the fortunes of his party. The death of Henry Pelham, the Prime Minister, had deprived the Whigs of a leader, who for more than a decade had been the autocrat of Parliament. Crafty and courteous, a shrewd judge of mankind, and a skilful opportunist, he had proved an efficient successor to Sir Robert Walpole as a party manager, and though destitute of genius and somewhat timid and lethargic, he had managed to preserve unity amongst his followers. For some years, indeed, before his death the Tory opposition had ceased to exist. Every politician of eminence was on the side of the Government. It was the period when Whiggism had reached its apotheosis.

For nearly forty years the party had enjoyed an uninterrupted reign of power. Its main policy, which, in the language of the time, was founded upon "the principles of the Revolution," had for its object the preservation of the supremacy of Parliament as delineated by the Bill of Rights, and the maintenance of the Hanoverian succession which had been defined by the Act of Settlement. In each respect its administration was a complete triumph. Since the first two Georges, troubling little about the concerns of their English subjects, were content with a limited monarchy, the authority of Parliament was never challenged by the king. In spite of two rebellions in favour of the Stuarts the

loyalty of the nation remained unimpaired, and after the defeat of the Pretender in 1745 there was no longer any danger that the established dynasty would be overthrown. The victory of the Whigs was assisted by the impotence of their opponents. Tainted with Jacobitism, torn by faction, and destitute of policy, the Tory party, save for spasmodic intervals, had been wholly ineffective as a fighting force, and seemed gradually to have lost the confidence of the nation. Under the strong, sane administration of Walpole the Whig principles of government came to be regarded as an integral part of the constitution, and a Doge-like king, entirely subservient to the two Houses of Parliament, seemed to be the only ruler acceptable to the English people. In all its essentials the policy of Walpole had been followed by his sedulous pupil, Henry Pelham.

Still, although the nation had been rescued from monarchical tyranny, there was a grave danger that a tyrant almost as oppressive had been put in its place. The Revolution, as manipulated by the Whigs, had merely transferred authority from the Crown to the Parliament, but had done nothing to protect the country from the despotism of the latter. The House of Commons, which under Walpole and Pelham had become the dominant power, was filled with pensioners and placeholders, entirely subservient to the executive. Its 550 members were returned by the votes of a fraction of the populace, and most of the constituencies were at the service of the highest bidder who sought their suffrages; or were obliged to return the nominee of some noble patron. In spite of the fact that it had such a small claim to represent the nation, it assumed prerogatives that were a menace to the liberties of the people. It had the power to imprison those who came under its displeasure. It decided disputed elections by the vote of the whole House. It claimed freedom from hostile criticism for all its members, as well as immunity from actions at law. In "the principles of the Revolution" the reform of the

representative system had no place. The Whigs had chained the king and made the Commons supreme. Their *métier* was at an end.

Being in this state of stagnation it was inevitable that they should be torn into fragments by schism as soon as party discipline should become relaxed. In no sense had they ever been a national party as the Tories were. No state Church was at their back. Now that all fear of Popery and the Pretender had passed away, there was no religious enthusiasm to unite their followers. For military conquest they had no inclination, having gained little credit in the recent war. Even the preservation of peace, by which Sir Robert Walpole had retained the support of the commercial classes, no longer seemed an imperative necessity in the eyes of the British merchant, for he realised that his country had vast interests at stake, and must take its part in the world-wide struggle for empire. Although the Whig party had done splendid service to the nation in abolishing absolutism and establishing constitutional government, it had lost all sense of initiative, and the great families who directed its policy took a part in public affairs merely to increase their share of place and power. With the death of Pelham the contest for the spoils of victory began in grim earnest, and the disintegration of the old Whig party was at hand. For the present, however, the Tories, who possessed neither a leader nor a policy, were incapable of taking advantage of their opportunities.

Five statesmen now dominated the political stage. Thomas Pelham Holles, Duke of Newcastle, who succeeded his late brother as Prime Minister, owed his position solely to his great parliamentary influence. His vast wealth and dexterity as a party manager had enabled him to gratify an insatiable craving for power. In conduct and demeanour he was one of the most grotesque politicians of his time—a fussy, envious, irritable buffoon, whose feverish temperament and incoherent speech had made him the object of

universal ridicule. Yet he was jovial and honest, and though everyone laughed at him, probably he had fewer enemies than any statesman of the time. There was something almost dog-like and pathetic in his devotion to the king, and there was more than a suggestion of the canine also in his whole disposition. Always noisy, excitable, and impulsive, it was well said of him that "he appeared to have lost half an hour in the morning and to be running after it all the rest of the day." It was fortunate for Newcastle that the Lord Chancellor, Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke, the greatest perhaps of all English lawyers and a politician of infinite sagacity, was his firm ally and most loyal friend, bound to him by ties of gratitude since early youth. In the Upper House Lord Hardwicke was without a rival, being beyond all question the most formidable debater amongst the peers, and his lofty eloquence, shrewd judgment, and legal acumen had been of incalculable service to the Whig party during two administrations.

The three other statesmen who, together with Newcastle and his mentor, exercised the greatest influence in politics were Commoners. William Murray, the new Attorney-General, a Scotsman of noble family and one of the most graceful of orators, might have reached the highest position if he had possessed the temperament of a statesman, but he had little relish for the hard blows that are inseparable from a political career, and believing that his talents were best suited to his own profession, he had already determined to take his seat upon the Bench at the earliest opportunity.<sup>1</sup> Henry Fox, the Secretary at War, was a professional politician without disguise, an admirable man of business, a skilful debater and a capable party manager, but absolutely unscrupulous in his parliamentary conduct, making two things only the objects of his public life—a fortune and a peerage. William Pitt, the Paymaster of

<sup>1</sup> In 1756 he became Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench with the title of Baron Mansfield.

the Forces, the only statesman who inspired enthusiasm in the country and incomparably the greatest force in the House of Commons, was at this moment entirely out of favour both with his party and with the king, but his association with Lord Temple gave him the assistance of a small but influential band of followers, and no Government could afford to exclude the Great Commoner.

It was as a whole-hearted supporter of the Newcastle ministry that John Wilkes presented himself to the electors of Berwick, with a letter of recommendation in his pocket from George Grenville, one of the Lords of the Treasury.<sup>1</sup> In a speech to the Guild of the town on the 16th of April he expressed many fine sentiments in praise of virtue and patriotism, and declared that "as he would never take a bribe so he would never offer one," a pointed allusion to the methods of his opponents, who were supposed to be engaged in a wholesale traffic in votes.<sup>2</sup> The other candidates were Thomas Watson, who had represented the constituency for many years, and John<sup>e</sup> Delaval, one of the dashing Delavals of Seton Delaval near Newcastle, a family whose reckless pranks were as well known to London society as to the people of his own county.<sup>3</sup> In a certain Robert Taylor, a Berwick bookseller, who delivered a notable speech on his behalf, Wilkes found an earnest supporter, but although he strove to capture the Nonconformist vote, most of the canny north-countrymen regarded him coldly. It was impossible that they could have any sympathy with this ostentatious young cockney, whose gaudy suits of red or blue, laced with gold, seemed chosen on purpose to offend their homely ideas. They looked with

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,877, f. 1; *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 9, 1763.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 25; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1768), p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> *The Delaval Papers*, J. Robinson; *Mems. of Tate Wilkinson*, ii.; *H. Walpole's Letters* (Toynbee); *Rems. of H. Angelo*, passim; *Mems. of N. Wraxall* (Wheatley), iv. 421; *Mems. of R. L. Edgeworth*, pp. 75-101; *Works of S. Foote*, i. cxxii.-iv.; *Town and Country Magazine*, ii. 570; iii. 408, 420; v. 289; ix. 234, 507, 597; xxi. 485; *Hist. of Doddington*, R. E. G. Cole.

suspicion upon his black squinting eyes; and his sallow face with its coarse twisted mouth, from which many teeth were missing, must have appeared the most ill-favoured that they had ever beheld. His speech was strange to them; they could scarcely comprehend his thick inarticulate utterance.

In spite of every disadvantage, however, he made a better fight than was expected. His wit and good-humour won many friends to his side; his restless energy and cunning tactics caused some uneasiness to his opponents. It is said that when the Delavals chartered a vessel to bring up a number of their London voters by sea, Wilkes bribed the captain of the ship to land his passengers on the coast of Norway, whence they were unable to reach Berwick till after the election was over.<sup>1</sup> Still, all his efforts were useless, and when the poll was closed on the 16th of April he had secured only 192 votes, nearly two hundred behind the first of his rivals.<sup>2</sup> The enterprise was believed to have cost him between three and four thousand pounds.

Undaunted by his defeat, he decided to petition against the return of his opponents, "alleging that Thomas Watson and John Delaval did, by bribery, in the most flagrant, notorious, and public manner, and in the most open and daring violation of the laws . . . corrupt and procure many of the Burgesses . . . whereby they did obtain a majority upon the poll."<sup>3</sup> In September he paid a second visit to Berwick in order to collect evidence of illegal practices, making a short tour also into Scotland, where he sought the acquaintance of David Hume, the philosopher, for he never missed an opportunity of cultivating the friendship of a man of letters. At this period of his life a large number of his intimates were of the Scottish race, and he selected

<sup>1</sup> *Rems. of Charles Butler*, i. 144. The same story is told of the Delavals; vide *Representative History*, by T. H. B. Oldfield, iv. 313.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 30, 1754.

<sup>3</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxvii. 30-31.



a north-country barrister, named Alexander Campbell, to present his petition to Parliament. The choice, so the story goes, proved an unfortunate one. Either the advocate was dissatisfied with his cause or with his client, for he declined to appear in the case, and when Wilkes waited upon him to demand the return of the retaining fee he was met by a refusal.

"The law is open to you," observed the barrister, coolly.

"No, sir," retorted Wilkes, "I will not go to law with you. . . . I have brought my advocate with me. Draw—" he continued, laying his hand on his sword; "before I quit this room I will either have my money or I will have satisfaction." <sup>1</sup>

A glance at the resolute eye and the obstinate jaw of his visitor convinced the lawyer that he was dealing with a man who had no sense of fear, and he returned the fee of fifty guineas without further parley.

The Berwick petition came before the House of Commons on the 25th of November; John Delaval, proud, cynical, devil-may-care, was in his place, and replied to the allegations against him in a speech full of wit and humour, pouring a torrent of gibes and sneers upon the petitioner, striving to overwhelm him with ridicule. It happened, however, that Pitt was sitting in the gallery, and for some time past the Great Commoner had shown much partiality for Wilkes, whom he had often met in the company of Thomas Potter and Lord Temple, being fascinated from the first by his sprightly conversation and ingenious mind.<sup>2</sup> 'His interest in the discussion, excited at the outset merely by friendship, gradually deepened into a feeling of indignation as he listened to the laughter with which the facetious sallies of John Delaval were received by his listeners. Hastening downstairs, he entered the House and flung himself into

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, July 9, 1768; *Wilkes's Jest Book*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 103.

the debate. Assuming an air of the loftiest scorn, he reproached his fellow-members for their levity, lamenting that they should have given way to laughter when such a subject as bribery and corruption was mentioned, warning them solemnly that such conduct would prejudice their honour and their dignity in the eyes of the nation. It was such a speech as a schoolmaster might have delivered in his form-room, and the Commons of Great Britain, whom the voice of Pitt always hushed into silence, listened to the scolding like schoolboys, each fearing to speak lest the thunder of the orator should fall upon his head. Even the bold Wilkes himself, who was listening to the proceedings outside the bar, confessed that until he realised that the Great Commoner was speaking in his favour he felt as terrified as when he used to be menaced by Mr. Worsley's birch-rod, and Pitt's chief rival, the unemotional Henry Fox, declared that everyone allowed it to be the finest speech that was ever made.<sup>1</sup> In consequence of this invaluable aid everything promised well for the success of Wilkes's appeal, and he wrote in high spirits to tell his friend Dell that he had got "his parliamentary business into the House," but the hearing of the evidence was extended over a period of many months, and at last, weary of the delay and intent upon new schemes, he decided to withdraw the petition.<sup>2</sup>

With her husband's political ambitions Mrs. Wilkes had not the least sympathy. Both she and her mother were annoyed that he should have squandered a large sum of money upon what they regarded as a foolish adventure. They resented his long absence from home, and in their opinion rich nobles and distinguished statesmen were un-

<sup>1</sup> *Rems. of Charles Butler*, i. 142-4; *Mems. of Lord Waldegrave*, p. 147; *Mems. of Reign of George II*, H. Walpole, i. 408; *Grenville Papers*, i. 126; *Chatham*, Lord Rosebery, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes withdrew his petition on Feb. 5, 1756. *Journals of House of Commons*, xxvii. 430; *Representative Hist. of Great Britain*, T. H. B. Oldfield, iv. 312.

suitable companions for a man in his position. For some time his profuse expenditure had caused them much uneasiness, and they feared that his new friends would lead him into greater extravagances still. One of the chief results of the Berwick election was the first serious disagreement between Wilkes and his wife.<sup>1</sup>

There were compensations, however, which more than atoned for the disturbance of his domestic peace. The celebrated William Pitt smiled upon him; nay more, he was already on terms of intimacy with the great man, who delighted in his society and declared that he was the most "wicked and agreeable" fellow that he had ever met.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the proud and austere minister, who appeared to the world as the most solemn and aloof of mankind, could be a very jocular companion in real life, and when Thomas Potter, his *fidus Achates*, read to him some of Wilkes's ribald parodies, he laughed as heartily as the dissolute barrister himself, declaring that the wit and fancy of the verses were entitled to very high praise.<sup>3</sup> Gout and the affairs of state prevented the Great Commoner from meeting his new acquaintance as frequently as he might have done, but he recognised his ability and was glad to number him among his disciples.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of Wilkes's love of letters his restless temperament had prevented him hitherto from any sustained literary effort, but he and Potter often exchanged similar poems to those that had amused William Pitt, and in the summer of 1755 they appear to have collaborated in a more ambitious work. Like all the previous productions of the wicked pair, this effusion was grossly indecent, being an obscene parody of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, imitated

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 28; cf. *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 128.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 103; Cf. *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxvii. 247.<sup>11</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 191.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Add. MS. 30,877, f. 5.

almost line for line. Probably neither of them knew which of the two had suggested the idea, but the division of labour seems to be indicated in a letter written by Potter to his friend from Exeter on the 31st of July :

“ Who your Mrs. M. is . . . I am at a loss to guess. I would reverse the letter and attempt the Essay on Woman without the hope of having a Commentator. They are a cursed race and often marr the text. Take notice I do not mean to censure your annotations. Thou art no marr text. But you sometimes supply a text when without your assistance it would be defective.”<sup>1</sup>

When the poem was finished it was entitled “ An Essay on Woman,” as Potter had proposed it should be, and it was dedicated to Miss Fanny Murray, who for nine years past had been the most famous courtesan in London, and who perhaps was the Mrs. M. whose name Wilkes had mentioned to his friend in connection with the parody. It opens with the following apostrophe :

“ Awake, my Fanny, leave all meaner things ;  
 This morn shall prove what rapture . . brings !  
 Let us (since life can little more supply  
 Than just a . . . and then we die)  
 Expatiate free o’er that loved scene of man,  
 A mighty maze, for mighty . to scan :  
 A wild, where *Paphian Thorns* promiscuous shoot  
 Where flowers the . . . but yields no fruit.”<sup>2</sup>

The verses were embellished with facetious footnotes, which the title-page announced to be written by the Rev.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B. f. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *An Essay on Woman and other pieces* . . . London. Privately printed, September 1871 ; cf. *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, Pisanus Fraxi [H. S. Ashbee], pp. 229-31 ; cf. Add. MS. 30,889, ff. 150-5 ; Crown Roll, No. 248, Court of King’s Bench, Public Record Office.

Dr. William Warburton, whose edition of Pope's works, full of pompous annotations, had been published four years previously, but the commentator obviously was Wilkes himself, delighted at the opportunity of ridiculing the pretentious clergyman whom his friends Edwards and Potter loved to make the butt of their sarcasms. It had no literary merit, being a stupid and indecent paraphrase of the original, but the collaborators often read it for the amusement of their friends, and Wilkes is said to have transcribed a copy in his neat, irregular hand-writing, which he inserted page by page into a small edition of Pope's *Essay on Man*.<sup>1</sup> Luckily, its authors made no attempt to get it printed.

During the same year Wilkes perpetrated another *jeu d'esprit* that created much amusement, though it was mere tilting at a windmill. Johnson's famous Dictionary, which appeared on the 15th of March, contained the extraordinary statement that "the letter H seldom, perhaps never, begins any but the first syllable." It was too good an opportunity to miss, and Wilkes, whose literary and political sympathies were entirely hostile to those of the learned doctor, composed the following travesty, which soon became famous all over the town: "The author of this remark must be a man of a quick apprehension and comprehensive genius; but I can never forgive his unhandsome behaviour to the poor knight-hood, priest-hood, and widow-hood, nor his inhumanity to all man-hood. . . ." <sup>2</sup> It is doubtful whether the Lexicographer discovered the author of the badinage, but he did not deign to alter the passage in question for many years, and as was his custom through

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 22,132, f. 217; *Journals of the House of Lords*, xxx. 416; *Guildhall MS.*, 214, 2, vol. i. "A genuine account of the Proceedings against Mr. Wilkes for being the author, printer, and publisher of the *Essay on Woman*."

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. Birkbeck Hill, i. 300; *Life of Frederick Reynolds*, i. 45-6; *Hist. of London*, B. Lambert, iv. 463. There was a copy of the satire in the Wilkes MSS., sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913, the first few lines of which are given above.

life, he would not gratify the author of the attack by writing an answer to it.

It was during this year also that Wilkes determined to contest the borough of Aylesbury at the next election. A political crisis had occurred, in which some of his friends were principally concerned, and there was much shuffling of Government places. Both Legge, the Chancellor of Exchequer, and Pitt, the Paymaster, had been dismissed from office because of their opposition to the foreign policy of the king ; while Fox, who, in the parliamentary fashion of the time, had been assisting the Great Commoner in his attacks upon their fellow-ministers for many months, had come to the rescue of Newcastle's moribund administration, eager to embrace the opportunity of making himself Secretary of State. It was the first serious breach in the Whig ranks since the death of Henry Pelham, one too that was fraught with grave consequences to the party, for Pitt was now the brother-in-law of Lord Temple, and had the powerful Grenville connection at his back. For many a long year faction and Whiggism were synonymous terms.

Naturally, Wilkes took sides with the mutineers, but apart from all motives of friendship, the wonderful political sagacity that never deserted him all through his life must have convinced him that it was to his interest to remain a follower of the Great Commoner. It seemed probable that there would be a contest at Aylesbury, for it was whispered that John Willes, through the influence of his father, would obtain some office as a reward for his loyalty to the Government.

"I am determined to oppose him," Wilkes declared in a letter to the invaluable Dell, "and will attack him with the utmost spirit, particularly the true Aylesbury way of *palmistry*. Be assured I will at any expense carry my point." <sup>1</sup>

In each of his communications to his faithful aide-de-

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, Nov. 24, 1755.

camp the incorruptible candidate of Berwick-on-Tweed reiterated, with unblushing candour, his intentions to purchase the seat.

"I will sink Willes by weight of metal," he informed Dell a few days later, "and we shall be thought heroes to turn a man out the moment he has kissed hands for a place."<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately for the conspirators no election was necessary, for their old ally did not obtain office, but the incident seems to have resulted in an arrangement whereby Potter undertook to resign in favour of Wilkes as soon as he could find another constituency for himself.

Meanwhile, the tranquillity of the dull old house behind St. Sepulchre's Church had become seriously disturbed. The homely Mrs. Wilkes had no more sympathy than before with her husband's political ambitions. To her thrifty mind the corrupt borough of Aylesbury seemed the most undesirable seat that he could have chosen. The society of his gay and fashionable companions was distasteful to her; their conversation was offensive to her prim, puritan ideas. Even if she was unaware of his repeated infidelities, she knew that he had lost all regard for her. As he himself acknowledged some years later, "she possessed his esteem, but no great share of his tenderness."<sup>2</sup>

It was the inevitable result of a *mariage de convenance*, doomed to failure from the first. The wife had neither tact nor charm, and made no effort to retain the affections of her gay and fickle husband, being wholly destitute of the feminine allurements that should have earned his fealty. In tastes, inclination, and conduct the two were totally at variance. Neither made any allowance for the deficiencies of the other. While most of their friends paid due acknow-

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, Dec. 1, 1755.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 28-9; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 128; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. lxxxvi.; *European Magazine*, xxi. 17.

ledgment to the good qualities of Mrs. Wilkes, not a few of them were agreed that the fault was not wholly on her husband's side. "She is perhaps the woman in the world the most unfit for him," it was remarked, "and the only one to whom he would not have been an uxorious husband, for he loves a domestic life."

The separation, which to those who knew them best had seemed inevitable for some time, took place at the end of the summer of 1756. During the whole year Wilkes had been absent a great deal from home, much engaged in nursing his constituency, and paying frequent visits to Bath. Social engagements occupied most of his evenings, for he was already a man of mark, and his interest in politics had brought him many new friends. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and a member of the famous Beef Steak Club.<sup>1</sup> About the beginning of September the ill-mated couple seemed to have agreed that it was impossible to live any longer under the same roof, so Wilkes removed to St. James's Place, where he secured "very elegant lodgings" in the house of a certain Mrs. Murray, while his wife continued to reside with her mother and Mr. Sherbrooke at Red Lion Court.<sup>2</sup>

In the following spring an incident occurred that put an end to all hope of a permanent reconciliation between the pair. Their daughter Polly, now six years old—a merry, black-eyed little girl, who had been her father's idol ever since her birth—was taken ill at school with small-pox. Scarcely any other trouble could have caused Wilkes more anxiety. Until all danger was passed he lived in hourly suspense. During the child's convalescence he watched with pathetic eagerness to see if there were any

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. of the Royal Society*, T. Thomson, Appendix XLV. Wilkes was elected F.R.S. April 13, 1749. *Life and Death of the Sublime Society of Beef Steaks*, W. Arnold, p. xix. Wilkes was elected a member of the Beef Steak Club Jan. 19, 1754.

<sup>2</sup> *London Past and Present*, H. B. Wheatley, ii. 296; *Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell*, Oct. 16, Oct. 23, Nov. 23, 1756.



scars on her face. He delighted in telling his friends how patient and good-humoured she had been the whole time. When at last she had recovered he took her down to Aylesbury, as his playfellow for a long summer's holiday, with "two maid-servants solely to attend her." No father had ever been more unselfish and devoted. The conduct of the mother, however, was very different. When the little girl began to be unwell Wilkes had written to his wife begging her to go to her daughter at once. As soon as the crisis was over he had reminded her again that her place was by the bedside of her child. His appeals fell upon deaf ears. Either Mrs. Wilkes was not competent to undertake the duties of a nurse, or she feared the infection, or perhaps she was jealous of her husband's love for his daughter, but whatever may have been the cause of her neglect, she never once visited the sick girl. And Wilkes, whose own mother waited upon the invalid every day with loving care, bitterly resented the inhuman conduct of his wife, which in his eyes was as infamous as a breach of her marriage vows.<sup>1</sup> Thenceforth the pair never lived together, and a formal deed of separation was drawn up by the family lawyers.

Soon afterwards the chief ambition of Wilkes's life was at length gratified. A vacancy occurred at Bath, whereupon Pitt, who had long wished to represent the city which he was compelled through ill-health to visit so frequently, gladly accepted a unanimous invitation to become its member, resigning the family borough of Oakhampton in favour of Thomas Potter. In spite of his "matrimonial fiasco" there was nothing to prevent Wilkes from seizing the opportunity, which this combination of politics and hygiene afforded him, to offer himself as candidate for the borough of Aylesbury. For many months his plans had been carefully matured and his popularity with the towns-

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, April 19, April 26, May 3, May 12, 1757.

folk was still unimpaired, "palmistry," as he had euphemistically expressed it, having made them his most obedient servants.

"I will give two guineas per man, with the promise of whatever more offers," he informed the faithful Dell, when he wrote to tell him that he was standing for the constituency, and he went on to add, "If you think two guineas not enough I will offer three or even five."<sup>1</sup>

Apparently five guineas proved sufficient, and on the 6th of July 1757, the incorruptible politician, who had boasted that he would never offer a bribe to any man, was elected member of Parliament for the town of Aylesbury without opposition.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, June 22, 1757.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, July 8, 1757; *Hist. of Aylesbury*, R. Gibbs, p. 220.

## CHAPTER IV

### MEMBER FOR AYLESBURY

1757-1761

THE new member for Aylesbury commenced his parliamentary career at an auspicious moment, for the choleric George II, after struggling vainly against the inevitable, had been compelled at last to admit the Great Commoner and his friends as members of a new ministry, under the nominal leadership of the Duke of Newcastle. Indeed, the Grenville party was the most powerful faction in the Government. Temple and his brother, George Grenville, as well as the recently disgraced Legge, all held high office; while Pitt, who had become Secretary of State for the first time, was for all practical purposes the head of the administration. His old rival Fox, to whom the acquisition of a fortune was of far more importance than political prestige, had chosen the lucrative post of Paymaster of the Forces, and was prepared to acquiesce in any policy that would afford him an opportunity of making money. To all appearance the friends of Wilkes were destined to a long reign of power.

The tactful John did not lose a moment in bringing himself before the notice of his leader, and the morning after the Aylesbury election he posted up to town for the sole purpose of calling upon Pitt, with whom, however, he did not obtain an interview. A few days later he wrote to inform the minister of his visit to St. James's Square.

"I was desirous of so early an opportunity of saying how greatly I wish to be numbered among those who have

the highest esteem and veneration for Mr. Pitt"; he continued, "I am very happy now to contribute more than my warmest wishes for the support of his wise and excellent measures; and my ambition will ever be to have my parliamentary conduct approved by the ablest minister, as well as the first character, of the age. I live in the hope of doing my country some small services at least; and I am sure the only way of doing so is by a steady support of your measures." <sup>1</sup>

Pitt appears to have been gratified by this homage, for he still had a soft corner in his heart for the vivacious young squire, whose lively wit and engaging manners had so often diverted his mind from the cares of statecraft, and he penned an early answer to the letter, assuring his follower that he had a sincere regard for him, and flattering him by a reference to his "great and shining talents." <sup>2</sup> Lord Temple's brother, the dull and industrious George Grenville, Treasurer of the Navy, also wrote to congratulate Wilkes on the day of his unopposed return, remarking that he was glad "to be the first to felicitate and embrace his new brother member." <sup>3</sup>

The Aylesbury election, together with the arrangements that occasioned it, was believed to have cost the sum of £7000, and Wilkes, whose personal extravagance seems to have been increasing year by year, began to have large dealings with Hebrew moneylenders, his transactions with Isaac Fernandes Silva in particular bringing to the unfortunate debtor infinite opprobrium in after years. <sup>4</sup> The corrupt borough that had returned him to Parliament also threatened to prove an expensive luxury. It was not long indeed before he was wont to declare that a gentleman

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 138; *Chatham Correspondence*, i. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,877, f. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,877, f. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 35; ii. 55; cf. *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxx., Part I, p. 499; *Controversial Letter of Wilkes and Horne* (1771), p. 206.

never ought to represent the constituency in which he resided, for his constituents would prove too heavy a tax upon his table and his wine cellar. Soon after his election, in spite of his financial embarrassments, he left the lodgings in St. James's Place and took a lease of No. 13 Great George Street, a commodious house at the western corner of Little George Street, a fashionable quarter of the town.<sup>1</sup> It was the first time that Wilkes's residence, both at Aylesbury and in London, did not happen to be next door to a church, a circumstance which caused some amusement to his friends, for he had long since earned a reputation for profanity owing to his habit of jesting upon sacred things.

In the course of the next year he made an effort to obtain a restitution of conjugal rights, issuing a writ of habeas-corpus to compel his wife to appear before the Court of King's Bench. In the deed of separation she had surrendered a large portion of her estate to her husband with the provision that he was to allow her an income of two hundred pounds, and it was alleged by his enemies that he had brought the law suit in order to compel her to relinquish this pittance as well. There is no proof, however, that this was his motive, which, by reason of the smallness of the annuity, appears an inadequate one. When the case was heard at Westminster Hall it seemed far more probable that Wilkes was playing for higher stakes, being anxious to compel his wife to live with him again in order to withdraw her from the influence of her mother and her uncle, so that the large fortune which she would inherit sooner or later might come into his hands. The attempt was a failure, for Mrs. Meade still had absolute power over her daughter's mind, and Wilkes was warned by the judge that since his wife wished to abide by the terms of their deed of separation

<sup>1</sup> Westminster Rate Books, Xmas 1757. Cf. *Grenville Papers*, i. 222; Lecture at the Surveyor's Institution by Mr. Julian Rogers on Jan. 22, 1912. There is a picture of the house in the Satirical Prints at the British Museum, No. 4055.

any further attempt to compel her to live with him would be regarded as contempt of court.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately for his happiness he had the custody of his little girl, the love of whom was the grand passion of his life, the one virtue amidst all his profligacy. The affection between the two was a most beautiful thing to behold, for the child's devotion to the father equalled his fondness for her, and the greatest joy of each was found in the society of the other. It was agreed by his friends that Wilkes was always seen at his best when his daughter was present, his conversation never being more bright and sparkling than when she was listening to it, while he appeared ever on the alert lest a word should be uttered that might wound her feelings or offend her modesty.<sup>2</sup> And the little Polly, although her father made so much of her, seems to have remained quite unspoilt, a lovable, simple-minded girl; but she had little fondness for her unsympathetic mother, who made no effort to win her affection, and the child's visits to Red Lion Court were an ordeal to both of them. Soon after the separation of her parents she had been sent to a school at Chelsea, kept by a Mrs. Aylesworth and a Madame Beete, where "a great number of young ladies of the first fashion in England were educated," which Wilkes had chosen after the most careful inquiries on the recommendation of his friend, Tobias Smollett, the novelist, who lived in the same neighbourhood.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, his social position was not damaged in the least by his matrimonial misfortunes, for his wife had been rather a hindrance than a help to him in his efforts to thrust himself into society, and the age in which he lived was not prone to ostracise a man merely because he was in the habit of breaking the seventh commandment. During a second tour in Scotland at the latter end of the summer

<sup>1</sup> *Reports of Cases in the Court of King's Bench*, Sir James Burrow, ii. 542; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 30, 35-7.

<sup>2</sup> *European Magazine* (1798), p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> Add, MSS. 30,867, f. 135; 30,875, ff. 28, 30; 30,879, ff. 1, 3.

of this year, he was invited by Archibald, Duke of Argyll, to stay a few days at Inveraray, which recently had been rebuilt, and Wilkes, with his wonted energy, rode thither on horseback all the way from Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> The visit was an agreeable one, for he and his host had many tastes in common, and he was much flattered by his kind reception. Some of the Duke's retainers congratulated him on being such a favourite with his Grace.

"It is truly lucky for me," chuckled Wilkes, who loved to poke fun in Cockney fashion at his Scottish friends, "for if I had displeased the Duke there is not a Campbell among you but would have been ready to bring John Wilkes's head to him on a charger. It would have been only 'Off with his head! So much for Aylesbury.'"<sup>2</sup>

About the same period his reputation among the gentlemen of his county was considerably enhanced owing to the good work that he had done in the reorganisation of the militia, a scheme which had been advocated by Pitt for many years. He became one of the first and one of the keenest officers of the Buckinghamshire battalion, the colonel of which was Sir Francis Dashwood, an amiable sensualist, who, finding that the member for Aylesbury was a kindred spirit, often used to invite him to his home at West Wycombe Park. There Wilkes often met an old acquaintance, Paul Whitehead by name, a brother member of "the Sublime Society of Beef Steaks," who was maintained by the jovial baronet as a sort of perpetual jester, being, as was indicated by his roguish eyes and demure tips, a fellow of infinite humour. And one day in an interval between their military duties the genial Dashwood, with a broad smile upon his blunt round face, suggested to his friend John that he should join the famous club of wits and bon-vivants known as the Monks of St. Francis, who held their

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, Sept. 26, 1758.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G, Birkbeck Hill, iii. 73.

meetings in an old house on the site of Medmenham Abbey on the banks of the Thames near Marlow.

It was an exclusive society, only twelve in number, sybarites all of them, who gathered together frequently along with their favourite mistresses for feasting and revelry, and since they were all rabid Protestants, there was often a mock celebration of religious rites in ridicule of the Church of Rome. The country folk christened them the Hell-fire Club, but they themselves were content with the title of Franciscan monks, which had been chosen as a compliment to their founder, Sir Francis Dashwood. Wilkes, who could match any of the fraternity in lust and profanity, was easily persuaded to join the society, for besides Paul Whitehead, who was secretary to the order, many of his acquaintances were members. Among them were several well-known country gentlemen, most of whom lived in the neighbourhood or had Buckinghamshire connections, such as Sir John Dashwood-King, brother of the president, Sir Thomas Stapleton and Sir William Stanhope, Dr. Benjamin Bates of Missenden, Bubb Doddington, a friend of Sir Francis, as well as a generous patron of the impecunious Whitehead, and Lord Sandwich, who, in the language of the day, was "the saddest dog" of them all.<sup>1</sup>

In later years, Wilkes himself wrote an account of the society, which shows that the iniquities of the Medmenham monks had been exaggerated very little by the testimony of their contemporaries. The motto of the club, borrowed from the inscription on Rabelais' Abbey of Thelema, and inscribed over the front door, was *Fay ce que voudras*, and a naked statue of Venus, stooping to pull a thorn from her foot, stood within a cave in the garden. To the Bona

Others, said to have been members on less conclusive evidence, were: Sir Francis Duffield, the owner of the Abbey, Henry Lovibond Esq., Richard Hopkins, Charles Churchill, Robert Lloyd, Thomas Potter, and John Hall Stevenson. That Wilkes belonged to the club is proved by a marginal note in his own handwriting on page 409 of a copy of the *History of the Late Minority* in the British Museum.



Dea, as the Goddess of Love was termed in the jargon of the "Franciscans," they were accustomed to offer libations in the midst of their symposiums, acclaiming her as the presiding deity of their revelries. Sir Francis Dashwood is alleged to have possessed a communion cup for this purpose, fashioned in a ribald design. The so-called "mystic rites" were profane orgies in celebration of venery, while the establishment was conducted as a travesty of a monastic institution, religion and morality being burlesqued continually. Scenes of drunkenness and debauchery took place at every meeting, and women of the town were present at all the feasts. "The garden, the grove, the orchard, the neighbouring woods," Wilkes confessed unblushingly in his description of the place, "all spoke the loves and frailties of the younger monks, who seemed at least to have sinned naturally."<sup>1</sup>

Practical jokes were a favourite amusement amongst the dissolute fraternity, Wilkes distinguishing himself in this respect on several occasions. Once, while his brother members were holding high revelry he and one or two fellow-conspirators lowered a sweep down the wide chimney of the banqueting-hall to the terror of the tipsy symposiasts, who believed that the Prince of Darkness had come for them at last. At another time he is said to have dressed a baboon "in the fantastic garb in which childish imagination

<sup>1</sup> *The Poems . . . and Life . . . of Paul Whitehead*, E. Thompson, xxxii.-xxxix. ; *Letters to and from Mr. Wilkes* (1769), pp. 17-20 ; *History of Buckinghamshire*, G. Lipscomb, iii. 615 ; *Chrysal, or The Adventures of a Guinea*, C. Johnstone, iii. 231-50 ; *Olio of Biographical and Literary Anecdotes*, W. Davies, p. 13 ; *Diaries of Mrs. Philip Poulton*, pp. 283, 379, 381 ; *Life of Frederick Reynolds*, i. 28 ; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 60-3 ; *Cat. of Satirical Prints in the British Museum*, iv. 306-7 ; *The Candidate*, Charles Churchill, l. 695 ; *Town and Country Magazine*, i. 122, v. 245-6, vi. 9 ; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 137-8 ; *Journal of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, ii. 563 ; *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, i. 31 ; *History of Aylesbury*, R. Gibbs, pp. 238, 424 ; *Annual Register* (1797), p. 377 ; *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 29, 1772 ; *Morning Post*, Aug. 22, 1776 ; *Morning Herald*, Dec. 16, 1781 ; *Political Register*, iii. 43. There<sup>is</sup> a picturesque account in *Highways and Byways in Buckinghamshire*, by Clement Shorter, pp. 202-5.

clothes devils," and to have let it out of a large chest in which he had concealed it while the brethren were in the midst of their sacrilegious ceremonials.<sup>1</sup> There was always mirth and excitement in the picturesque old abbey when Jack of Aylesbury, as the brethren called him, was present at the feast.

Although the age was tolerant enough to breaches of morality most of the Medmenham monks were regarded by contemporary opinion as past-masters of vice. No circumstances in the life of John Wilkes did more to increase his reputation for profligacy than the fact that he had been a member of the club on the banks of the Thames.

When he had been a member of Parliament for nearly two years Wilkes found an opportunity of doing an act of kindness on behalf of Samuel Johnson, of which, with his usual good nature, he hastened to take advantage, in spite of the fact that the great lexicographer, who hated both his politics and his morals, was one of the few distinguished authors who did not care to be his friend. In the spring of 1759 Francis Barber, the doctor's black servant, to whom he was much attached, was seized by a press-gang and carried on board a man-of-war. As soon as he learnt what had happened, Tobias Smollett, the surly, warm-hearted Scotch novelist, who was a great friend of Wilkes, like so many of his countrymen, wrote to the member for Aylesbury, telling him that "the great Cham of literature" was "in deep distress," and requesting him to appeal to the Lords of the Admiralty for the release of the pressed lackey. Without a moment's hesitation Wilkes put the case before the authorities, who gave instructions for Barber's immediate discharge, but their order, owing to some mischance, was not carried out until more than twelve months had elapsed. Smollett, who must have known of the *jeu d'esprit* with regard to the letter H, and imagined no doubt that "the

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds*, i. 28; *Chrysal, or The Adventures of a Guinea*, C. Johnstone, vol. iii. 240-2.

great Cham's "dislike of the satirist was caused by the satire instead of being an honest aversion against one whom he regarded as a bad man, was full of admiration for the magnanimity of Wilkes.

"Your generosity with respect for Johnson," he wrote on hearing that steps were being taken for Barber's release, "shall be the theme of our applause and thanksgiving."

Nevertheless, his knowledge of human nature must have made it clear to him that the learned doctor and Jack of Aylesbury, at this period of their lives at any rate, could be nothing else but the bitterest enemies.<sup>1</sup>

To the surprise of those who were aware of his great talents Wilkes made little or no impression upon the House of Commons during the first four years after his election. Apparently, he was content to remain for the most part a silent member, never obtruding in a debate of any importance, and on the few occasions on which he opened his lips he was voted dull and uninteresting.<sup>2</sup> Yet, although he possessed no ready fluency, he could compose an admirable set oration, and many of the first parliamentarians of the day were wholly dependent upon this means of addressing the House. Characteristic sloth, however, deterred him from these laborious methods, for in spite of his active mind he was now a slave to the pursuit of pleasure; while, owing to his fastidious taste, he shrunk from making the usual clumsy attempts to improve his oratory by impromptu speaking.

Other reasons may have persuaded him that he would reap no material advantage in gaining the ear of Parliament. The greatest abilities, as he was well aware, could not raise a man to a high position in the state unless he was of ancient lineage or allied to a noble house. No doubt, he realised that if Henry Fox had not married a daughter of the Duke

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. Birkbeck Hill, i. 348; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 46-9; *Johnsonian Gleanings*, A. L. Reade, Part II, pp. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 315; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 142.

of Richmond, he might have been a prominent politician, but in all probability never would have become a minister of the Crown. It was obvious, even in the case of Pitt himself, and this was scarcely a fair example, that the alliance with Lady Hester Grenville had been of incalculable help in his parliamentary career, without the prestige of which he might never have been accepted as Secretary of State. The elder Craggs, who was the sole example of a man unconnected with an aristocratic family attaining office (and he came of a good family of country gentlemen), had lived the life of a party hack, owing all his success to his genius for figures. Wilkes, who had no financial ability and who loathed drudgery, knew well enough that although the nobility of England were pleased to accept him as a friend, to laugh at his jests, and entertain him in their houses, they would never consent to allow him to take an important part in the government of the country. There was no pusillanimity in his view of the situation, but his mind was essentially a practical one, and he had no desire to strive after the unattainable.

Thus, during the four glorious years of the Pitt-Newcastle administration Wilkes remained a humble unit of his party unknown perhaps to half the House, giving his vote loyally in support of the Government whenever it was required, never taking part in debate without the approval of his leaders. Already he had made up his mind whither ambition ought to lead him, being eager to obtain a rich governorship or a lucrative embassy, so that he might obtain relief from the burden of debt that threatened to overwhelm him. It was a misfortune that there should be this waste of great talents, for no one was more prescient in his judgment of political events, nor held a finger more closely upon the pulse of the country. These four years, too, were the most splendid in the annals of Great Britain. All over the world the brave French nation, owing to the incapacity of its statesmen, not because of any lack of valour on the part

of its soldiers and its sailors, had suffered a crushing defeat. In the Far East the victories of John Company, under the leadership of Robert Clive, had left England without a European rival as the suzerain of India. In North America the British arms had been triumphant everywhere, and that vast continent was secured for all time to the English-speaking race. A series of great naval battles had made the fleets of Britain supreme in every sea. On the continent King Frederick of Prussia, aided by the armies and the subsidies of England, had restored the balance of power that had been threatened for so long by the ambitions of France, fulfilling the prediction of Pitt that he "would conquer America in Germany." And the timid Whigs, while they were wise enough to acclaim the policy of the Great Commoner as a party triumph, looked with dismay upon the wave of patriotism that had swept over the country, feeling that the tradition of the sect had been outraged, and that their new leader was borrowing their majority in order to realise the alien doctrine of imperialism. Naturally, they seized the first chance of overthrowing Pitt and all his works.

At Whitsuntide in the year 1759 Wilkes was elected "the people's" church-warden for the parish of St. Margaret, Westminster, the difficulty in finding church officers overbalancing any prejudices that there might have been against his moral character.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he was a regular attender at every Sunday morning service, his home being scarcely a hundred yards' distant from his place of worship, and as yet his fellow-parishioners probably were not aware of his connection with the Medmenham monks. All through his life, in spite of his fondness for posing as a pagan, Wilkes was ever ready to take his share in parochial work. "I remain sound in the faith," he assured his daughter some years later, "and I will keep to my good, orthodox mother,

<sup>1</sup> Information kindly given by the Very Rev. H. Hensley Henson from the records of St. Margaret's, Westminster.

the Church of England, to the last moment of—its legal establishment.”<sup>1</sup> As a churchwarden, however, he did not please the parish. At the end of the year he was not mentioned in the usual vote of thanks, though his colleague was praised warmly, nor was he nominated for re-election, as was the custom at the time.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the end of the next year the death of George II, which took place on the 25th of October, 1760, set every politician thinking out his plans in view of a general election. The situation at Aylesbury was complicated by the intrusion of a third candidate, a privy councillor named Wellbore Ellis, who had come forward under the auspices of his father-in-law, Sir William Stanhope, one of the Medmenham monks and the member for the county. For some time an anxious correspondence had been passing between Wilkes and Dell, since the returning officer foresaw that the new development was certain to increase the inevitable charges of “palmistry.” Finally, they decided to limit their attentions to a certain number of the electors.

“What say you to three hundred *trees* at five guineas a *tree*?” Wilkes wrote to his unpaid election agent, indicating the amount that he was prepared to give for every doubtful vote. “Three hundred picked and let the mongrels yelp their hearts out . . . select three hundred and bid the others do their worst.”<sup>3</sup>

In a later letter he confessed to Dell that he was doubtful of his chances.

“I know that if any man offers a shilling more that I shall not be your member, but you know I never will be ill-used. . . . I declare they shall have five guineas or else I desire no vote, but I will never be trampled upon, and I would as soon sell my estate at Aylesbury and quit the borough now as hereafter.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *The Westminster Records*, J. E. Smith (1900), p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, Dec. 27, 1760, Jan. 1, Jan. 3, and Jan. 27, 1761.

At last Willes, the sitting member, perceiving that his success was hopeless without lavish expenditure, retired from the struggle, "going out with a stink," as his late colleague politely expressed it, leaving his two opponents in possession of the field. No other candidate was forthcoming, so when the long-delayed polling day at last arrived, on the 25th of March, 1761, Wilkes was returned as member for Aylesbury without opposition for a second time along with Wellbore Ellis.<sup>1</sup>

A few weeks previously he had suffered a bereavement that hurt him sorely. On the 31st of January his good-natured father had passed away in the old home in St. John's Square.<sup>2</sup> They had always been the best of friends, delighting in each other's society at all times, often even in late years being companions upon many a holiday tour or country ramble. Through good report and evil the affection of Israel Wilkes for his prodigal son had remained unchanged.

"My heart is so full of grief," ran the letter in which John hastened to convey the news of his loss to the sympathetic Dell, "for my poor father expired to-day, but without a pang or a groan, only ceasing to breathe. I wish that you or I, with every friend we have, may have as quiet and peaceable an exit."<sup>3</sup>

The death brought no legacy to the needy politician, for he had long since exhausted his patrimony. "On the marriage of my son John Wilkes," ran the Will, "I conveyed to him Lands and Tenements value £330 yearly, which with the presents I have made him I declare to be the whole to be given to him."<sup>4</sup> Upon Heaton Wilkes, the youngest of the three sons, devolved the task of managing the family business, and since he had little more commercial

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 27, 1761.

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxi. 44. The register of St. James's, Clerkenwell, show that Israel Wilkes was buried there on Feb. 5, 1761.

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence of Wilkes and Dell, Jan. 31, 1761.

<sup>4</sup> Will of Israel Wilkes (40 Cheslyn).

ability than either of his brothers, the consequences were disastrous.

Having no longer any hope of receiving another legacy, John Wilkes sought to disentangle himself from his embarrassments by obtaining a place of profit under the Government. On the eve of the Aylesbury election he wrote to Pitt, begging for a post at the Board of Trade, but discovering that there was no suitable vacancy in this department, he asked to be appointed ambassador at Constantinople, the late minister having recently resigned.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the place had been reserved by the Temple faction for one of themselves, and, to Wilkes's chagrin, the coveted office was given to Henry Grenville.<sup>2</sup> A worse disappointment was in store for him. Since the general election it had been obvious that a parliamentary crisis was at hand. The Whigs could no longer tolerate the foreign policy of Pitt, and the new king was eager to place the Government in the hands of Lord Bute. On the 5th of October the inevitable rupture took place, and the Great Commoner, whose position had become untenable, resigned his office. Lord Temple followed him into retirement, and with the overthrow of his two best friends Wilkes's last hope of obtaining a lucrative sinecure faded away.

<sup>1</sup> *Chatham Correspondence*, ii. 93-5; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxi. 238.



## CHAPTER V

### THE POLICY OF GEORGE III

1761-1762

**T**HE overthrow of Pitt was brought about by one of the most remarkable combination of parties that had ever occurred in the history of English politics. For the moment an ambitious young king, who was determined to strengthen his prerogative with the help of the Tories, had joined hands with the most powerful of the Whig factions in order to stem the tide of imperialism that was impeding the aspiration of both. Yet, in everything but hostility to the policy of the Great Commoner, the two allies were as wide asunder as the poles.

Since his childhood George the Third had been taught to accept a theory of monarchy that was hostile to the principles of the British constitution as laid down by the Bill of Rights. From his German mother he had learned to regard England as though it were a small Teutonic electorate, and her constant advice, "George, be King," had left an indelible impression on his mind. Most of his tutors had belonged to the High Church party, while his favourite, Lord Bute, who was the mentor of his boyhood, had inspired him with the ambition of realising Bolingbroke's conception of "a patriot King," supreme over Parliament, even if he had not actually made him a true believer in the doctrine of divine right. Upon his accession to the throne, on the death of his grandfather, it was this same Lord Bute whom George selected as a fellow-conspirator to help him to realise his aspirations.

At this moment the Whig oligarchy, in spite of its

apparent strength, was more vulnerable than it had ever been since the Revolution. Although the leadership of Pitt, notwithstanding its glorious achievements, had never been acceptable to the magnates of the party, who were loyal to the traditions of Walpole and anxious for peace, the city of London and the great towns, where hitherto the Whigs had found almost unanimous support, continued to favour a policy of imperialism, their appetite for conquest and glory unsatiated still. This new schism, which in the end cleft the party in twain, was augmented by the various dissensions that had been dividing the parliamentary ranks of the Whig oligarchy ever since the death of Pelham. The "great families," jealous of the ascendancy of Pitt, were seeking to restore the old regime under which they had ruled the land since the beginning of the century. A powerful faction, headed by the Duke of Bedford, regarded the war as a national disaster, perceiving that until it was over they would never obtain the share of power to which they believed they were entitled. The Grenville clique had become utterly disunited, most of them being prepared to support any policy that might lead to office. Thus, when George the Third ascended the throne he found that the great party, whose first principle was the limitation of the power of the monarchy, had been utterly demoralised by internal discord, and he lost no time in taking advantage of the opportunity to realise his long-cherished dreams of a supreme king. The initial step in the constitutional reaction was taken in March 1761, when he managed to persuade the Whig Government to accept Lord Bute as Secretary of State. Six months later the young sovereign gained his second victory, when Pitt, beaten in the cabinet by the intrigues of the newly promoted favourite, gave up the seals, leaving to Newcastle the impossible task of controlling his mutinous forces alone.

The conduct of the great statesman, whose resignation had been hastened by the refusal of his colleagues to declare

war against Spain, was defended by none of his followers more loyally or with greater ability than by the member for Aylesbury. On the 13th of November, during the debate on the address the House of Commons was startled by an uncommon spectacle, the gaunt figure of John Wilkes—one of the rarest of speakers—rising amidst the crowded benches, his obstinate jaw thrust forward, squinting menacingly. In tones of bitter scorn he plunged into a bold criticism of the king's speech, which, he insisted with perfect truth, should be regarded as the speech of the minister, "though of what minister," he added with a hoarse chuckle, while his auditors laughed at the witticism, "I cannot tell." Proceeding to defend the policy of his leader, he declared that a secret treaty existed between France and Spain, arguing that Pitt was right in wishing to frustrate the machinations of the Spaniards by commencing hostilities before they were ready to attack England.<sup>1</sup> It was a daring speech, candid and truculent, a more notable oration than any Wilkes had hitherto made.

Early in the following year he found another opportunity of vindicating the conduct of his leader. A few weeks after Pitt's resignation the Spanish Government had thrown off its mask, openly acknowledging the alliance with the French, and the inevitable declaration of war had followed. The apologists of Pitt contended that his foresight was justified, while his opponents protested that France would never have entered into the Family Compact with the Spanish if the British minister had been willing to accept a reasonable treaty of peace. Upon the publication of the secret negotiations the stormy controversy broke out anew, and the usual shoal of pamphlets poured from the press. Most noticeable of all of them, attracting far more attention than any, was a lengthy essay, which Wilkes published anonymously on the 9th of March, entitled "Observations on the Papers relative to the Rupture"

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 71.

with Spain, laid before both Houses of Parliament on Friday, Jan. 29th, 1762." <sup>1</sup>

It was the first political treatise that Wilkes had written, and a most forcible apology on behalf of Pitt. Choosing as his text the general proposition that war had been inevitable, he denied that the statesman whom he defended had wished to provoke a contest, alleging that "before the first overtures of France for the particular peace with England, Spain had resolved at a proper time to take an efficient and openly hostile part against us." Having accused the Government of suppressing many documents relating to the negotiations, he declared that Pitt, on the contrary, desired "to lay open and reveal to an unerring public both the motives and actions of every part of his Administration. A retrospect carries no terrors but to the guilty. . . ." In a burst of true Wilkish rhetoric he pronounced a grand eulogy upon his hero. "I am persuaded," he wrote, "had the direction of British counsels been suffered to continue in the same hands, the name of Pitt had soon been as dreaded at Madrid as it is at Paris, or as it is dear to his grateful countrymen." The "glaring duplicity" of the Spaniards was the subject of many scathing comments. "I think the conduct of Spain . . . was so grossly partial to our professed enemies as would have justified any overt acts on the side of England from every principle of justice. . . . The only question most evidently was whether we should enter into it (the war) with every advantage on our side, or from weakness, indecision, or a delusive hope at best, give our determined enemy that time to prepare, which it was notorious she wanted." Upon the new members of the Government he let off all the shafts in his quiver, occasionally making a palpable hit. "Two Secretaries of State in these dangerous times become Ministers

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, i. 19; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 63; *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers in the Case of John Wilkes* (Paris, 1767), p. 223; *The North Briton* (W. Bingley, 1769), vol. i., Part I, p. lix.

by inspiration! We have as little experience of them as they of business."

It was an effective essay in the robust art of the pamphleteer, a successful one also since most Englishmen believed its statements to be true. Yet it is doubtful whether the verdict of posterity has endorsed contemporary opinion. Since the one grand object of English statecraft had been accomplished, and British rule over India and North America firmly established, there seems little doubt, in the light of subsequent history, that Pitt would have been well advised to accept the terms of peace that the French Government were prepared to offer. Although it was possible to defeat our allied enemies in every sea and to extend our colonial empire still farther, it is certain that if France, incomparably the greatest military nation in Europe, had been thus compelled to concentrate all her efforts upon continental conquest, the German states would have been overwhelmed one by one and the balance of power upset as completely as it was in later years during the Napoleonic wars. At this crisis in our history it is probable that Pitt was not so true a friend to his country as George the Third and the Whig statesmen, who believed that it was best for England to be content with her great triumphs and seek for peace.

An amusing incident arose out of the publication of the "Observations on the Spanish Papers," by which title the pamphlet was popularly known. On the day after it appeared Wilkes happened to meet an ambitious parson named John Douglas, while walking in the park, and, in a similar spirit of mischief to that which prompted the tipsy Sheridan to claim the name of Wilberforce, he informed the clergyman that many persons believed him to be the author of the anonymous tract. In great perturbation the reverend gentleman, whose main object in life was to thrust himself up the ecclesiastical ladder, made frantic efforts to trace the rumour to the fountain head, finally writing to

Wilkes himself to beg him to disclose the source of the information.

"If the report gains credit," he pleaded piteously, "it will be as prejudicial to my interest, as it is absolutely unsupported by truth."<sup>1</sup>

The incorrigible jester was delighted by the success of his joke and gravely informed his victim that he would contradict the rumour, assuring him in a letter full of veiled sarcasm "there is not a man in this country who more honours your superior literary abilities than I do, or more warmly wishes, for the dignity of our Church, to see them rewarded in an eminent and distinguished manner."<sup>2</sup>

The metamorphosis of John Wilkes from a mere political dilettante into one of the most ardent of partisans was now complete. Having implicit faith in "the principles of the Revolution," he regarded the despotic tendencies of the King with watchful suspicion, while his adoration of Pitt made him the bitterest antagonist of Lord Bute. Although the disappointment of losing all chance of obtaining a place of profit naturally increased his resentment against his opponents, he was full of honest wrath against those who had brought his party to ruin, being a sincere Whig of the old school, and when he declared in later years that "accident had made him a patriot," meaning that he had not been actuated by a sincere conviction, he was merely jesting, as was his constant habit, at his own expense.<sup>3</sup>

Political events moved rapidly. On May 26, 1762, the Duke of Newcastle, realising at last that he had exchanged the autocratic Pitt for another master in the person of the King's favourite, resigned the premiership to which he had clung with senile tenacity for so long, and Lord Bute became Prime Minister in his place. The new Government was an odd collection of individuals, selected mainly on account

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 68-9; *Letters to and from Mr. Wilkes* (1769), pp. 172-3.

<sup>3</sup> *European Magazine* (1798), p. 225.

of their supposed subserviency to the will of the sovereign. Lord Halifax, as genial a debauchee as Wilkes himself, and Lord Egremont, a supercilious noble whom Wilkes detested, were eventually chosen as Secretaries of State. George Grenville, the most talented of the band of brothers, who had deserted his clique because he disapproved of Pitt's militarism, was appointed to the Admiralty, after holding the seals for the northern department for a short period. It being necessary to retain a competent debater in the Lower House, the avaricious Fox was permitted to keep the lucrative office of Pay-master, and when the occasion arose he was persuaded to undertake "the management" of the Commons, Lord Bute having determined to win over a sufficient number of "King's friends" by a system of bribery and proscription. The appointment, however, that caused the most adverse criticism was the choice of Sir Francis Dashwood as Chancellor of the Exchequer, the jovial president of the Medmenham monks having so little capacity for figures that Wilkes was able to convulse the town with laughter by picturing him as a politician who had been "puzzling all his life over tavern bills."<sup>1</sup>

The Whig party having been completely routed, Lord Bute, in collusion with his royal master, was able to look forward with confidence to its annihilation, his plan being to obtain the King's supremacy over the legislature by a systematic purchase of votes. It was necessary, in the first place to terminate the war, the money that had been lavished upon the army and the fleet being now required for the bribery and corruption of Members of Parliament. When the peace was once concluded, the Court party, encouraged by their recent triumphs, anticipated little difficulty in extinguishing the Whig oligarchy for ever. Accordingly the negotiations with France and Spain were hurried forward, and in little more than a month after

<sup>1</sup> Dedication prefixed to *The Fall of Mortimer*, John Wilkes; cf. *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 75.

Lord Bute had finally re-constructed his ministry the preliminaries were signed at Fontainebleau. When the details were at last divulged, the country was ablaze with indignation. Not content with the suzerainty of India and America, the people of England were anxious to keep every inch of conquered territory in other parts of the world, and the restoration of so many recent acquisitions in the West Indies gave rise to angry protests that Bute and Bedford had been bribed by the enemy. In a witty aphorism Wilkes expressed the opinion of his fellow-countrymen with his usual neatness.

"It is certainly the peace of God," he sneered, "for it passeth all understanding."<sup>1</sup>

When Dashwood accepted the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, he hastened to convey the surprising intelligence to Wilkes, adding in his bluff hearty manner that the news would "make him wonder and that very justly."<sup>2</sup> At the same time he wrote to the officers of the Buckinghamshire militia informing them that he was obliged to resign his commission as Colonel, suggesting that the lieutenant-colonel "a man of spirit, good sense and civil deportment, who has shown resolution and industry," should be his successor.<sup>3</sup> This eulogium referred to Wilkes, who, originally a captain, had become second in command, and Lord Temple, the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, naturally being of the same opinion as Sir Francis Dashwood, the member for Aylesbury received the vacant commission. The regiment was stationed in camp near Winchester, guarding the French prisoners, and all through the summer Wilkes devoted himself to his military duties with his accustomed zeal.

One who made his acquaintance at this period has left an unflattering portrait of the militia colonel. Edward Gibbon,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, iii. 246.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 176.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 39; Add. MS. 30,867, f. 178; Guildhall MS 214, f. 1, vol. 3; Eg. MS. 2136, pp. 29, 49.



the future historian, then a plump little captain in the South battalion of the Hampshire militia, who dined with him in the month of September, has recorded that the company spent a "very debauched day" drinking "a good deal both after dinner and supper." Indeed, when Wilkes had retired to rest, some festive souls broke into his room and persuaded him to consume another bottle of claret. Gibbon was charmed by the wit and high spirits of the Buckinghamshire colonel, but he formed a poor opinion of his moral character.

"A thorough profligate in principle as in practice," he considered him, "his life stained with every vice and his conversation full of blasphemy and indecency. These morals he glories in—for shame is a weakness he has long since surmounted."<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, on this occasion, Wilkes was at some pains to shock the company by pretending that he had attacked Bute and attached himself to Pitt and Temple only "to make his fortune"—a *mère* paraphrase of the asseveration that "accident had made him a patriot." The scandalised Gibbon treasured up the memory of this apparent lack of principle, forgetting that the Great Commoner and his brother-in-law were old friends of the member for Aylesbury, while the King's favourite was the most dangerous enemy that his party had encountered.

While he was at Winchester camp, Wilkes conceived the idea of printing the ribald parody that his poor wrong-head friend Potter—now in the grave—had written in collaboration with him many years before. Doubtless he wished to present a memento of their dead comrade to a few of his fellow-rakes, so that each might have in his library a copy of the verses that had been so often recited at their symposiums while the bottle coursed round the table and

<sup>1</sup> *Works of E. Gibbon* (1814), i. 142 n.; Add. MS. 32,568, f. 25; *Table Talk of S. Rogers* (Dyce), p. 351.

the laughter rang high. Accordingly he commissioned George Kearsley, the printer in Ludgate Street, to set up the poem in type, and let him have proofs struck off in red ink as well as black for his final revision. Tringham, the well-known book-plate engraver, was also instructed to work a suitable title-page on copper with a phallic design,—a shameful title-page indeed, composed by Wilkes himself, which contained an atrocious libel on an Archbishop.<sup>1</sup> Pressure of business seems to have prevented Wilkes from proceeding far with the printing of the poem, and when he resumed the task a few months later he soon had cause to regret that he had not allowed the "Essay on Woman" to lie safely in his desk.

But his principal occupation during the whole time that he was in charge of his battalion had been a new and furious campaign against the Prime Minister. The inspiration came to him from the enemy. On becoming First Lord of the Treasury, the Earl of Bute had established a weekly paper for the defence of his Government in opposition to a formidable old Whig periodical called *The Monitor*. Wilkes's choleric friend Tobias Smollett, a loyal Scot though an inefficient journalist, was chosen editor of the new ministerial organ, which was christened *The Briton*. The opportunity of meeting the apologists of the Government in weekly controversy was irresistible, and Wilkes lost no time in setting up a rival sheet, which, in derision, he dubbed *The North Briton*. Henceforth, whether in camp, at Aylesbury, or in London, he managed to find leisure for the publication of his paper each Saturday morning, writing most of the numbers himself, but occasionally obtaining the help of the burly, blustering Charles Churchill, who had taken the place of Thomas Potter as his *fidus Achates*. Naturally, *The North Briton* was filled with violent abuse of the ministry and its friends, but it was

<sup>1</sup> *The Grenville Papers*, i. 489-90; Add. MSS. 22,132, pp. 34, 94, 217; 30,885, f. 156; Guildhall MS. 214, f. 1, vol. 3, *passim*.

well written, witty, and epigrammatic, and from the first it proved a great success.<sup>1</sup>

Wilkes was now thirty-seven years old, and he had long been a man of mark. If he had gained no other reputation, his fame as a wit would have been sufficient to make him a celebrity. In the college hall, in the lobbies of St. Stephen's, in the club and in the coffee-house, his latest bon mot passed from lip to lip. Folks looked to him, as to Foote and Lord Chesterfield, to provide the town with its supply of humour. Some of these ancient jests have descended to posterity, and although the witticism of one age becomes a platitude in the next, a little of Wilkes's badinage can still raise a laugh, showing that the salt has not lost its savour.

Everyone admired the neatness of the repartee, when Wilkes, on being asked to take a pinch of snuff, shook his head decisively, and, holding his finger and thumb wide apart, replied: "Thank you, I have no *small* vices,"<sup>2</sup> and many less polished quips appear in modern comedy.

The stalwart Protestants of his time were delighted with a famous retort of his to a Catholic clergyman, who in the course of a theological dispute put to him the pertinent question: "Where was your religion before Luther?"

"Did you wash your face this morning?" demanded Wilkes, and when his antagonist gave a smiling assent, he inquired calmly: "Where was your face before you washed it?"<sup>3</sup>

Soon after he had commenced his crusade against the arbitrary Government of George the Third, a lady begged him to take a hand in a game of cards.

<sup>1</sup> *English Newspapers*, H. R. Fox Bourne, i. 153-161; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 91-3; "J.T.Y." in *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, ix. 104; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 140; *Public Advertiser*, June 2 and June 5, 1762; *Wilkes, Sheridan, Fox*, W. F. Rae, pp. 27-8; *Wilkes and Cobbett*, J. S. Watson, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 114; *European Magazine* (1798), p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 11; *Diary of Crabb Robinson*, i. 95.

"Dear Madam," he answered, "do not ask me, for I am so ignorant that I cannot tell the difference between a king and a knave," and no true Whig was ever tired of quoting the apposite reply.<sup>1</sup>

One day while walking on the Steyne at Brighton he met a young lady of his acquaintance.

"You see, Mr. Wilkes," she explained, "I am come out for a little sun and air."

"I think, Madam," he replied, "you had better get a little husband first."<sup>2</sup>

Most popular, perhaps, of all his jibes was his retort to Lord Sandwich. The dissipated earl had laughingly prophesied that Wilkes would die of a venereal disease or on the gallows.

"That depends, my lord," came the swift reply, "whether I embrace your mistress or your principles."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in spite of his celebrity as a wit, the member for Aylesbury did not succeed in winning the position in society to which he aspired. Although he was welcome enough at a man's party, the great hostesses would not deign to recognise him. With the exception of Lady Temple, who was obliged to tolerate his company when her husband had need of him, no *grande dame* appears to have opened her doors to him. This ostracism was not wholly due to the exclusiveness of the English nobility, which even in his day was often relaxed in favour of some whose origin was no more distinguished than his. In spite of the fact that he had not been to any of the great public schools, it was possible that John Wilkes might have won the same social success as Anthony Storey or James Hare by becoming the satellite of a man of rank, unless there had been some grave reason to prevent his advancement. Possibly his progress was hindered by his financial embarrassments, but

<sup>1</sup> *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 12. (This bon mot is also attributed to Joseph Jekyll.)

<sup>3</sup> *Statesmen of George III*, Lord Brougham, 3rd series, p. 189.

beyond all doubt it was his reputation as a profligate that caused society to look askance at him. Although no more immoral than most of his contemporaries, he gave the impression of being unable to put a curb upon his passions. Whether true or false, the story told by Horace Walpole that Wilkes "had debauched a maiden of family by an informal promise of marriage," shows how popular opinion regarded the man's character.<sup>1</sup> No one would have credited the most merciless rake of the period, such as Lord Pembroke or Sir Francis Delaval, with such an outrage upon the principle of *noblesse oblige*, save under exceptional circumstances and swayed by genuine infatuation, but the author of *The North Briton* was believed to sin through mere wantonness, being no respecter of persons; and Wilkes, who loved to shock the world by painting himself in the blackest colours, made no attempt to assume the cloak of a hypocrite, even to gratify his social ambitions. Whatever was worst in his character was always known of him.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 142; cf. Dr. Johnson's opinion of Wilkes's morals. Birkbeck Hill's *Boswell*, v. 339.

## CHAPTER VI

### "THE NORTH BRITON"

1762-1763

WITH his wonted sagacity, Wilkes had been the first to perceive that the best means of damaging the Government that had repudiated his friends was by waging a fierce journalistic warfare in guerilla fashion against the unpopular Prime Minister. Even before Lord Bute had become First Lord of the Treasury, Wilkes held him up to ridicule as a court minion in an article in the *Monitor*, and a few weeks later in the same periodical he had insinuated that the relationship between the King's mother and the unpopular statesman resembled that of Madame de Pompadour and her *cher ami*, the Abbé de Bernis.<sup>1</sup> It was to deride the nationality of the Premier that he selected the title of *The North Briton* for his new paper, the first sheet of which was published on the 5th of June, 1762, a week after the minister had accepted the seals of office. The bookseller whom Wilkes desired to employ, one William Johnston of Ludgate Street, refused to take the risk of publishing the periodical, but eventually George Kearsley of Ludgate Hill, the nephew and successor of one Jacob Robinson, accepted the responsibility on the understanding that he was to be permitted to disclose the identity of the real author in case of prosecution.<sup>2</sup> A printer named

<sup>1</sup> *The Monitor*, May 22 and June 12, 1762. *The North Briton* (1763), iii. 31, 41; *Dic. Nat. Biog.*, in the admirable article on John Wilkes by J. M. Rigg; cf. *Hist. of Late Minority* (J. Almon), 4th ed., p. 58; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. xi.; *English Newspapers*, H. R. Fox Bourne, i. 153.

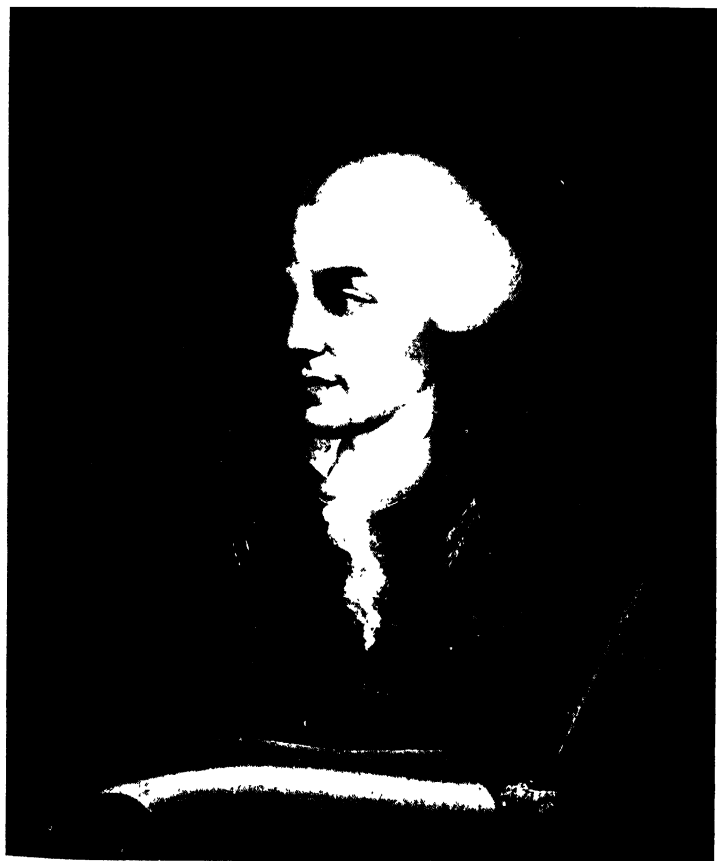
<sup>2</sup> Guildhall MS. 214-4; "Proof of authorship of *The North Briton*, No. 45"; cf. Add. MS. 35,400, f. 160.

Dryden Leach, of Crane Court, Fleet Street, was secured under the same conditions. The first number opened with a fine sentence in the true Wilkish manner: "The liberty of the press is the birthright of a Briton, and is justly esteemed the firmest bulwark of the liberties of this country," which formed the text of a terse, vigorous article, full of veiled sarcasm aimed at the unpopular minister and his Scottish nationality.

A Caledonian ancestry was at that time a most serious embarrassment to any public man who desired to make his mark in English politics. The immemorial hostility to the people of the North, which was almost a natural trait throughout England, had in recent years been fanned into a fiercer flame by the Highland invasion of '45, while the success of Scottish immigrants in every walk of life increased the resentment. Almost every Englishman regarded a Scotsman with bitter hatred, ridiculing his manner of speech, the poverty of his country, its barrenness, the bleakness of its climate, attributing to him dirty habits and loathsome diseases, making him the butt of a hundred ill-natured sarcasms.<sup>1</sup> This attitude of mind, which is revealed so constantly in the table-talk of Dr. Johnson, nowhere found more violent expression than in the pages of *The North Briton*, where Wilkes put forth all his wit and eloquence in reviling the people of Scotland. The second, third, and fourth numbers of the paper were filled with cynical insults against the whole race.

It was inevitable that this conduct should put an end to many old friendships, for since the Leyden days, when Alexander Carlyle and John Gregory were his fellow-students, some of Wilkes's bosom companions had been natives of the sister kingdom. Among the first to break with him was the irascible Smollett, the rival editor, stung beyond endurance by the references in *The North Briton* to "the numerous

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. of England*, W. E. H. Lecky, iii. 50-4; *Wilkes, Sheridan, and Fox*, W. F. Rae, p. 21.



JOHN WILKES

*From a painting by P. Hudson in the Aylesbury Museum*





Scotticisms" in his literary style and the ceaseless affronts to his national pride.<sup>1</sup> Before long also, his dear friend Dr. Armstrong, who had watched over the health of little Polly Wilkes with almost parental fondness for many years, sent him a curt letter saying: "I cannot with honour or decency associate with one who has distinguished himself by abusing my country;" though some believed that the resentment of the physician was caused principally by the unauthorised publication of one of his poems which he had entrusted to the editor of *The North Briton* for safe custody.<sup>2</sup> These defections, however, did not cause Wilkes to modify his crusade in the slightest degree, and as the arch-enemy of Scotland he soon began to be regarded by his fellow-countrymen as almost a national hero.

It was in *The North Briton*, No. 5, published on July 3, that Wilkes reached the height of his audacity, elaborating his Bernis-Pompadour innuendoes with still greater emphasis. For an historical analogy he selected the early days of the reign of Edward the Third, when he reminded his readers there had been "a minority under the direction of a *Mother*, actuated by strong passions and influenced by an insolent minister."<sup>3</sup> Without the least disguise he compared Lord Bute to Mortimer, while the character of Queen Isabella was contrasted with that of the Dowager Princess of Wales, who, like her predecessor of old, was believed by the mob to have a liaison with the royal favourite. Having suggested that the Scottish earl as well as Mortimer had arranged a peace to the disadvantage of England and for the benefit of his fellow-countrymen, he declared, with an obvious inference, that "Mortimer was

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 50-1.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 216. See *Dic. Nat. Biog.*, under "John Armstrong"; *Life of Hume*, J. H. Burton, p. 148; *Lit. Anecdotes of Eighteenth Century*, J. Nichols, ii. 309.

<sup>3</sup> *The North Briton*, printed for J. Williams (1763), i. 38. (This was the edition in 3 vols.; printed at Wilkes's private press in Great George Street). "J.T.Y." in *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, viii. 101; cf. Add. MSS. 22,132, ff. 146, 283; 30,868, f. 40.

indebted for the enormity of his power to a criminal correspondence with the Queen Mother.”<sup>1</sup> It was an amazing philippic, written with a restraint that made the invective all the more forcible, undoubtedly the most audacious leaflet that had been hurled against the Government, and the young King, who loved and honoured his mother, must have been more than human if he had ever forgotten the insult.

At this period Wilkes and Churchill had become the closest of friends, an unlucky circumstance for the former, since although he was unamenable to influence and could learn nothing in vice from any man alive, the spirit of emulation made him prone to compete with his ally in extravagance and profligacy.<sup>2</sup> An uncouth reprobate, drunkard as well as debauchee, notwithstanding that he was a clergyman, the poet had blazed into fame during the previous year with the publication of “*The Rosciad*,” a satire upon the stage. Though raised by popular acclamation to the throne that had been vacant since Pope’s death, he had revealed little of the imagination and had displayed none of the art of the man of Twickenham, and conscious that he would suffer in comparison with this first model, he acclaimed Dryden as his master, aping the rough vigour of the great John with as much success as lack of genius had permitted him. Later, in the Hudibrastic vein, he produced some verses that one who was not the least fastidious of his contemporaries described as “glorious,” but he was a dull fellow at the best, without a spark of humour, having little merit save a species of rugged vehemence.<sup>3</sup>

No more suitable henchman, however, could have been found for Wilkes’s purpose. While the member for Aylesbury was toiling to make his battalion as efficient as a regiment of the line, which he congratulated himself upon accomplishing before they were disbanded, Churchill under-

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton* (1763), i. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,878, f. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 442.



6  
CHARLES CHURCHILL  
*as "he appeared in blue coat with metal buttons and gold lace on his  
left and waistcoat" (See D.N.B.)  
From a painting in the possession of John Lane*



took the duty of correcting the proof sheets of *The North Briton*, and was always ready to write one of the papers himself when his chief could not find leisure for the task, the periodical gaining in scurrility what it lost in wit when these occasions arose.<sup>1</sup> Wilkes, nevertheless, was satisfied with his collaborator. "I admired exceedingly what I read last Saturday," he assured his friend on the 27th of July. "Your last *North Briton* I liked excessively," he informed him a few weeks later. "A thousand thanks for your verse and prose of Saturday," he wrote to his colleague on October 25, "you have managed *The North Briton* incomparably."<sup>2</sup>

Whether the pen was wielded by Wilkes or by his satellite, the public read the paper with the greatest eagerness. The daily press contained no leading article, and, except when an occasional letter from some industrious correspondent appeared in its pages, every reader was left to form his own estimate of political events. It may be imagined with what delight the typical English householder welcomed the new addition to his breakfast-table on a Saturday morning. Even the sternest Tory laughed with glee at the sparkling witticisms against the hated Scotsmen. Hundreds of electors who loved and honoured their young king nodded with stern approval over the clever diatribes at the expense of Lord Bute, and repeated to one another the rumour of his liaison with the Princess of Wales. The heart of every stalwart Whig glowed with fresh courage, and it was declared—and with much truth—that a great political writer had appeared, the most excellent pamphleteer since the days of Swift.

Yet, although this was the opinion of the rank and file, the leaders of the party were by no means unanimous in their approbation. Pitt indeed was frankly hostile from the first, as Wilkes himself acknowledged later, for the great

<sup>1</sup> Guildhall MS. 214, 4; *The Grenville Papers*, i. 473.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,878, ff. 5, 13, 14.

minister had always striven for the principle of national unity, and was sorely grieved that one of his own henchmen should be the foremost in reviling the brave Scottish nation.<sup>1</sup> At the outset Lord Temple also disapproved of the policy of *The North Briton*, and although he modified his opinion for a little while, his combative instinct being unable to resist the fascination of a journalistic battle when the odds were all on the side of his own party, he confessed to his friends that he hated "this paper warfare," and was much incensed that he should be regarded as its instigator.<sup>2</sup> The Duke of Devonshire, however, whom the King's mother had dubbed in derision "The Prince of the Whigs," declared that Wilkes was the life and soul of the Opposition, and many of his principal followers shared his views.<sup>3</sup>

Each week throughout the summer Wilkes and Churchill continued to launch their thunderbolts against the Government, eulogising Pitt, abusing "the favourite," making cynical reflections upon the King himself.<sup>4</sup> No one was spared whom it served their purpose to lampoon, with the exception of Sir Francis Dashwood "the tavern-bill" Chancellor, who owed this clemency to the free-masonry of the Medmenham monks.<sup>5</sup> Even such an unobtrusive diletante as Horace Walpole received a mild castigation because he was supposed to have flattered the Scotch and panegyrised Henry Fox, but he conciliated his critic by having "taken it so well," which he might not have done had the blow been a less light one.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Johnson, now a Government pensioner, was one of the earliest victims of *The North Briton's* sarcasms, many of the caustic definitions in

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's Marginalia, in *Hist. of Late Minority*, 3rd Imp. (Brit. Mus.), p. 399.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes's Marginalia, *ibid.*, pp. 399, 401; *The Grenville Papers*, i. 456, ii. 4; *The Chatham Correspondence*, ii. 193.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkes's Marginalia, *ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>4</sup> *The North Briton* (1763), i. pp. 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> Wilkes's Marginalia, *ibid.*, p. 409.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), i. xlvi., v. 289; *The North Briton* (1763), i. 17, 54, ii. 136.

his own Dictionary being quoted against him.<sup>1</sup> So seriously did Bute regard the onslaughts of his enemy, that he established a second paper, named *The Auditor*, under the editorship of Arthur Murphy, an Irish playwright, as an auxiliary to Smollett's journal. Before many weeks had passed, Wilkes had the satisfaction of knowing that he had become one of the greatest political forces in the land, and he strutted about the Winchester camp in his scarlet coat and cocked hat with the proud consciousness that there were few of his foes who did not fear him.

"Why do not the Print Shops take me?" he chuckled, "I am an incomparable subject for a print,"<sup>2</sup> and his fame certainly justified this last great tribute to notoriety.

During the next month he was engaged in a quarrel with another old friend. It came to his knowledge that the great genius of William Hogarth, who had been a fellow-member of the Beef Steak Club for many years, was about to be employed in the service of the Government, a political caricature having been projected, called "*The Times*," in which the principal leaders of the Opposition were to be held up to ridicule. Having remonstrated with the artist, he learnt that, although it was intended to satirise Pitt and Temple, neither Churchill nor himself would be assailed, whereupon he replied that he "should never believe it worth while to take notice of any reflections on himself, but if his friends were attacked, he should then think he was wounded in the most sensible part, and would, as well as he was able, avenge their cause," adding significantly "that if he thought *The North Briton* would insert what he sent he would make an appeal to the public on the very Saturday following the publication of the print."<sup>3</sup> Not only was Hogarth under

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton*, i. 99, 101-5; ii. 175. Cf. *Boswell's Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Guildhall MS. 214, I, vol. 3. Letter from Aylesbury, Aug. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to and from W. Wilkes* (1769), pp. 188-9; *The Political Register*, i. 288; *Hogarth's Works*, J. Ireland and J. Nichols, ii. 182; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 24.



considerable obligations to Bute, but his purse, as was often the case, at that moment needed replenishing, while no doubt he considered himself in honour bound to keep his promise to his employers ; so, notwithstanding the threats of the autocrat, " The Times " made its appearance in due course.<sup>1</sup> The dreaded caricature, however, proved to be a puerile production, most harmless and ineffective as a political cartoon.

It depicted a street of burning houses, emblematic of the world in flames, which the Premier, with the help of a fire-engine manned by soldiers and sailors, was endeavouring to subdue, while Pitt and Temple strove to excite the conflagration.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as a warning to those who might seek to defy him, in order to show that his commands could not be disobeyed with impunity, Wilkes proceeded to make a savage attack upon his old friend, devoting a whole number of *The North Briton* to his castigation. No diatribe was ever more merciless. The painter's favourite picture, a portrait of his wife, was ridiculed with cruel mockery. He was accused of being the most envious and malevolent of mankind, swayed only by vanity and love of gain, delighting in the darkest phases of human nature, wholly despicable and bad at heart.<sup>3</sup> Nothing was omitted that malignity could devise to cause him pain. Hogarth, an old man in weak health, was sorely wounded, but with the tenacity of a proud sensitive spirit he treasured the memory of the affront, ever on the alert to discover an appropriate revenge.

At the same time Wilkes was engaged in a much more troublesome quarrel. In *The North Briton* of August 21 he had offended Earl Talbot, Lord Steward of the Household, by a witty satire upon his horsemanship.<sup>4</sup> A few days later his victim sent him a letter to demand that

<sup>1</sup> *Anecdotes of Hogarth*, by himself, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *William Hogarth*, A. Dobson, p. 132 ; *Cat. of Satirical Prints* (Brit. Mus.), iv. 188-93.

<sup>3</sup> *The North Briton* (1763), i. 154-65.

<sup>4</sup> *The North Briton* (1763), i. 108-9.

he should either acknowledge or disclaim the article, to which Wilkes replied that he must first insist on knowing his lordship's right to catechise him about an anonymous paper.<sup>1</sup> A long and acrimonious correspondence followed, which ended in Lord Talbot sending Colonel Norborne Berkeley with a challenge to his lampooner to fight a duel on Bagshot Heath. The letter in which Wilkes hastened to accept the invitation revealed a flash of his irrepressible humour, for he not only invited his adversary's second to sup with him, but even suggested that they should make a *partie carrée*.<sup>2</sup> On the 5th of October, the appointed day, incapable still of regarding the matter seriously, he swaggered into the Red Lion Inn, a famous hostelry kept by the famous Tom Tilbury, which had been chosen as their rendezvous, accompanied by Harris, his adjutant, fresh from an orgie at Medmenham Abbey, and filled with the spirit of jocular bravado. An interview with Lord Talbot soon convinced him that there was no chance of an amicable supper and the postponement of this combat till the morning, or in that event *sine die*, as he seems to have expected.

Furious with passion, the earl addressed him in terms that made a duel inevitable. Maintaining his aplomb, Wilkes suggested that the doors should be locked and the affair settled at once in that same room. For a moment Lord Talbot's anger blazed forth afresh, and he declared that this would be "mere butchery." Then, mollified by the good humour of his enemy, he reproached Wilkes for attacking him without provocation, asking "in a soothing tone of voice," if he were not sorry to make him unhappy. The wit begged permission to ring for pens and papers, chatting amiably with the angry peer meanwhile, reminding him of the occasion on which he had been his guest at Wycombe camp; but when the writing materials had been brought a touch of seriousness came over him, and he

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 41-2.

<sup>2</sup> *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers* (Paris, 1767), pp. 12-13.

scribbled a letter to his patron with the pathetic request that if he were killed, Lady Temple should superintend the education of a daughter whom he loved beyond all the world.<sup>1</sup> A moment later he had become a gay swashbuckler again, and he desired that they should proceed at once to the field of battle. More than half appeased by the amiability of his antagonist, Lord Talbot retorted that he seemed in a great hurry to be killed, whereupon Wilkes reminded him that he was running a double risk, since he fought with a halter round his neck, while the earl was fighting with "the King's pardon in his pocket." The Lord Steward having made the obvious repartee that Wilkes was sure to come to the gallows, the irrepressible wit inquired if he was to be "killed first and hanged afterwards."<sup>2</sup>

Neither of the combatants was eager for the fight, their verbal warfare having extinguished most of the nobleman's indignation, but both had gone too far to recede with honour, and after some discussion it was agreed to adjourn to a garden near the inn. It was now seven o'clock at night, but there was a bright moon. Wilkes's high spirits were undiminished to the last, for when his opponent demanded how many shots they should fire, he answered with a laugh, "As many as you please. I have brought a bag of bullets and a flask of gunpowder."<sup>3</sup>

They were placed back to back at a distance of ten yards, and the Adjutant, having given the signal, both wheeled round and discharged their pistols simultaneously. Wilkes, one may be sure, took care to miss, while it was also certain that Lord Talbot could not find it in his heart to take a steady aim at such an incorrigible jester; and the two bullets whistled harmlessly into the darkness. Scarcely had the reports died away when the journalist walked up to his antagonist and confessed that he was the author of

<sup>1</sup> *The Grenville Papers*, i. 477, 479.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 35; cf. Add. MSS. 35,400, ff. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 32,567, f. 170.

the offensive article. The earl replied that Wilkes was a gentleman and a man of honour, after which they all returned to the Red Lion, where they made a most good-humoured *partie carrée* after all, over a bottle of claret.<sup>1</sup> Needless to add the public were much amused by the incident, and Wilkes had the satisfaction of seeing many caricatures of the duel in the windows of the print shops. Apparently, too, he became more than ever "a lion among the ladies," on his return to camp.

"A sweet girl whom I have sighed for unsuccessfully these four months," he confessed to both Churchill and Lord Temple when he wrote to them from Winchester, "now whispers me that she will trust her honour at the first Shepherd's minute to a man who takes so much care of his own. I must look into my old friend Johnson for what is synonymous to the word *honour*, to guess at the fair one's meaning." <sup>2</sup>

A few days previously, Arthur Murphy, the inconsequent Irishman who edited *The Auditor*, printed a statement in his paper to the effect that Wilkes had insulted a son of Lord Bute, a boy at Winchester school, by abusing his father in his presence, threatening also that he would bring him to the block. Though the story was too absurd for belief, since his worst enemies admitted that "Jack was a scholar and a gentleman," <sup>3</sup> Wilkes instructed Churchill to compose an elaborate denial in No. 21 of *The North Briton*; while he requested Dr. Burton, the head-master of the college, to make a public investigation of the charge in his behalf. The pedagogue, however, probably with good reason, did not consider that he was justified in taking notice of the calumny, notwithstanding that Wilkes had

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's account of the duel in a letter to Lord Temple, published in the *St. James's Chronicle*, May 14-16, 1767, and *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 29-30, is corroborated in the main by two letters from Dr. Birch, Add. MSS. 35,400, ff. 3, 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,878, f. 10; cf. *The Grenville Papers*, i. 486.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase is Dr. Johnson's; see Birkbeck Hill's *Boswell*, iii. 183.

inflicted a severe punishment upon some of his militiamen, who had insulted a Winchester boy a short time previously.<sup>1</sup> Still no one credited the story, and Wilkes continued to be, as he boasted to his friends, "more caressed than I can tell."

A re-shuffling of ministerial offices now took place. It was found necessary to purchase a majority in the Commons favourable to peace, and Henry Fox, the paymaster, was selected as the one strong man able to enforce the King's intentions, being admitted to the Cabinet and ousting George Grenville as "manager" of the Lower House. A system of wholesale bribery and intimidation, never surpassed in the history of Parliament, was quickly established. As usual in such cases, a host of superfluous bureaucrats was created, innumerable turncoats being rewarded for their apostasy by the gift of rich sinecures. "A shop was publicly opened at the Pay Office," Horace Walpole declares, with metaphorical accuracy at all events, "whither the members flocked and received the wages of their venality in bank bills." Loans were raised in order to reward the supporters of the Government with a share of the profits. It was made plain to all that while the "King's friends" would be lavishly rewarded his enemies would be ruthlessly proscribed. As a public warning the sovereign struck the name of "the Prince of the Whigs" from the list of Privy Councillors with his own hand. The whole of the Civil Service was microscopically pruned and weeded, the humblest clerk or exciseman being discharged without explanation if he was suspected of being a supporter of any member of the opposition. Every vote, both in Parliament and the constituencies, was regarded as the property of the Crown. At last George the Third had worked his will and the House of Commons lay crushed beneath his feet.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton* (1763), i. 196; Add. MSS. 35,400, ff. 11-12; 30,878, f. 11; 30,875, f. 72; *The Grenville Papers*, i. 486.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 157; *Hist. of England*, W. E. Lecky, iii. 56-8; *Early Hist. of Charles James Fox*, G. O. Trevelyan, pp. 31-3.

During the following month the Militia was disbanded, and after he had given his battalion "a farewell drink" at Reading, the carouse lasting for three days, Wilkes was at liberty to devote all his time to the crusade against the Government. Although the Rev. John Entick had been arrested under a warrant from the Secretary of State in consequence of some articles that had appeared in *The Monitor* at various times, together with Arthur Beardmore, the attorney, who assisted Lord Temple in his political intrigues, *The North Briton* continued its campaign with unabated vigour all through the winter without interference from the authorities.

On the 15th of March in the following year Wilkes published a second political essay, an ironical "Dedication" to the Earl of Bute of Ben Jonson's historical play, *The Fall of Mortimer*. Its significance was revealed in the first paragraph. "I purposely dedicate this play to your lordship, because history does not furnish a more striking contrast than there is between the two ministers in the reigns of Edward the Third and George the Third." Edward "was held in the most absolute slavery by his mother and his minister. The first nobles of England were excluded from the king's councils, and the minion disposed of all places of profit and trust."<sup>1</sup> Avoiding with wily tact any direct allusion to the notorious friendship between the Premier and the Dowager Princess, the scandalous inference nevertheless was apparent to the lowest intelligence all the same. It is the most excellent of all Wilkes's political writings. In a spirit of good-humoured banter and with a lightness of touch that rendered his satire the more keen, he sketched a witty travesty of the recent policy of his enemy. The proscription of the Whigs, the ignominious Peace, the Prime Minister's improper influence over the young king, all were made the subject of the gayest mockery, while the airy references to Bute's bad spelling, his patronage

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 71.

of unworthy authors, and his fondness for amateur theatricals conveyed the impression that he was one of the vainest and weakest of mankind. Written in admirable English, each sentence well balanced and each word selected with care, it reveals an acute appreciation of the value of language, in style and wit worthy of comparison with the best specimens of Junius. Wilkes himself was well satisfied with the composition, upon which he had lavished infinite pains.

"It is usual to give dedicators something," he remarked, with charming audacity, to Jeremiah Dyson, one of the most subservient of Government henchmen. "I wish you would put his lordship in mind of it."<sup>1</sup>

The historical opinion of modern days has been unanimous almost in its condemnation of George the Third on account of his departure from "the principles of the Revolution," looking backwards, as it were, through an inverted telescope as if the scene was of no importance in detail, regarding the progress of constitutional evolution as though it had followed inevitably a natural law. Such an attitude involves the proposition that the growth of the nation from precedent to precedent has been directed better and more wisely by a legislative assembly elected more or less under popular suffrage than it could have been by any other form of Government, a proposition that will find an emphatic contradiction in the history of Japan and the development of modern Germany. Both of George the Third's predecessors on the throne had been foreigners, with whom he had nothing in common, whose personality and policy he had been taught by family tradition to despise. It was his proudest boast that he had been "born a Briton," and it was his ambition to reign as an English king, not a mere doge like his grandfather and great-grandfather before him. Obviously, as his advisers were well aware, the Bill of Rights must be violated before these ambitions could be

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole (Toynbee)*, v. 294.

gratified, but it had been violated already by another power. "The third great charter of English liberty" only protected the liberties of the people as far as "the great families" would permit. One of its most important clauses had declared that "the election of members of Parlyament ought to be free," but almost every constituency was the private property of a peer, or, owing to the small number of the electors, might be captured by the candidate who offered the largest bribes. The House of Commons that George the Third wished to subjugate was not the representative of the people of England. It was merely, as the younger Pitt declared twenty years later, "the representative of nominal boroughs, of ruined and exterminated towns, of noble families, of wealthy individuals, of foreign potentates."

George the Third's struggle for supremacy was fought against the great Whig families: it was not a quarrel with the people of England. Although the nation was bitterly incensed because Pitt, who was its idol, had been discarded, and Bute, who was its *bête noire*, had been preferred, if the positions had been reversed it is not improbable that popular approval would have been on the side of the king in his attempt to limit the power of the aristocracy. Judged from the standpoint of the statute book, the policy of George the Third was unconstitutional, and so, as in all revolutions, its best apology would have been its complete success, while if it had brought forth good fruit it would have been amply justified in the eyes of posterity. In the end, however, the king's departure from "the principles of the Revolution" proved a failure, mainly because he was unable to enlist the services of Pitt and chose to make an enemy of John Wilkes. Accordingly, we cannot tell to what extent the nation might have profited under the rule of a benevolent autocrat, assisted by the wisest ministers, unchecked by the embarrassments of party obligations, untrammelled by the vicissitudes of party strife.



The speculation is an attractive one. Only those who are content with the result of our constitutional evolution, who believe that each national problem as it has arisen has been solved in the best way, who deny that many a social evil has been created by the folly and selfishness of class and of party, will refuse to admit the possibility that England, like other modern powers, might have fared as well during the storm and stress of the eighteenth century beneath the sway of "a Patriot King." At a time when the factory system was making the greatest changes in the life of the people, when a vast increase in population was building up a hundred modern towns, it was of the utmost importance that the development of the nation should have been guided by those who had no covetous taskmasters to serve, and who were raised above the desire of promoting their own material interests.

As events have proved, George the Third and his descendants were not the men for the great work. Let us condemn him, however, for his failure, and not for the attempt. Had he been sagacious enough to seek the co-operation of the greatest intellects of his day, if he had engaged such as Pitt, Burke, and the younger Fox as fellow-labourers in the great cause, and if Lady Sarah Lennox had been the mother of his children, the destinies of humanity might have been moulded in a brighter and happier shape. But, under any circumstances, in order to have worked his will with his people, he could not have disregarded the inflexible spirit of the indomitable John Wilkes.

## CHAPTER VII

"NO. 45"

1763

LORD BUTE resigned office abruptly on the 8th of April. A much more shrewd politician than his enemies were willing to believe, he realised that his task was ended and that he could serve the king better as a private councillor than as an officer of the Crown. His unpopularity was an embarrassment to the Government; he had little talent for public life. So he sought solace amongst his prints and his flowers, still playing the rôle of a Mæcenas in miniature, a patron of the smaller fry in art and letters, haughty and aloof to most of mankind, always giving the impression that he was intensely vain of his handsome face and fine person; in the opinion of the world, a mere lay figure with "the most beautiful legs in Europe." Yet, there were tougher elements in his character than were evident to the public eye, or he would never have accomplished a great constitutional change.

Six days before the resignation of his enemy, Wilkes had crossed the Channel for the purpose of taking his daughter to Paris, where he wished her to finish her education under the care of a certain Madame Carpentier.<sup>1</sup> During his visit to the French capital he was gratified by "the great civilities" shown to him by the Duke of Bedford, who, in spite of his political views, entertained him hospitably, but he complained privately that the ambassador gave bad dinners with no suppers after his assemblies, "a great subject of disgust" to the Parisians.<sup>2</sup> Foreseeing that a

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 28, 1763.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 35,400, ff. 42, 48.

ministerial crisis was imminent, he did not think it wise to remain away from London for many days, and leaving Paris on the 6th of April, he reached Calais three days later. There, while waiting for a packet to take him to England, he chanced to meet Prince de Croz, the governor of the town, who asked him how far the liberty of the press extended in England.

"I cannot tell," the wit retorted, "but I am trying to find out."<sup>1</sup> Before sailing he wrote the following letter to his daughter :

CALAIS, *April 9, 1763.*

MY DEAREST POLLY,—I embrace with much pleasure this opportunity of writing to you by a gentleman's servant, who is just arriv'd from England and is now setting out for Paris. I was very grave, not to say melancholy, almost the whole way here, having for a time lost my most agreeable companion, and Mrs. Shephard,<sup>2</sup> too, lamented it much. I have generally rode on the little bidets, and have put Mrs. Shephard and Brown<sup>3</sup> in the Post-Chaise, but I had one bad fall, and have hurt the thumb of my right hand so much that I can scarcely write at all. It is so painful that I wou'd not write to anybody but my dearest daughter, and to Mr. Foley a letter of thanks on her account. The tour here you have so lately taken that it can afford nothing new to entertain you. We saw the treasures and the reliques at St. Denis, and it will be well worth your while soon to take a little trip there. I shall certainly be with you the latter end of May, or beginning of June, and then we will make the tour of Fontainebleau, Marli, &c., with Madame Carpentier, if she will be so good to favour us with her company.

We lay at Rouen, two posts from Paris on Wednesday, on Thursday at Amiens, and last night at Boulogne. We

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 315.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Wilkes's maid.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Brown, Wilkes's servant.

have had no accident at all but to my poor thumb, which is as black as my daughter's eyes and so stiff that I can scarcely move it.

A gentleman just arriv'd from England tells me that Lord Bute is entirely out. I shall not write you any politicks by the post, for fear of my letters being open'd, but you shall hear everything important, when any gentleman is coming to Paris.

Whatever cloathes you wish for or anything else, desire Monsieur Carpentier to pay for. Let the bill be sent to him. Every three months Mr. Foley<sup>1</sup> will pay him again and draw upon me. I wish that my sweet girl may have every reasonable pleasure, and I am sure that her good sense will desire no other. I dare say you will be happy with Madame Carpentier; and I have paid them the highest compliment in trusting them with a treasure I love so entirely as my dear daughter. Any money you wish for you may have, but let Monsieur or Madame Carpentier<sup>2</sup> pay for everything, except the postage of letters, which you may pay yourself. I shall soon write to Madame Carpentier, and shall enclose it to you, which will save her the postage.

When you are well, I beg you never to miss the Ambassador's chapell on Sunday; and I trust a good Providence will favour you with confirm'd health at Paris. Mr. Foley will put you in a way to go with Mrs. Poyntz, and she will ever be glad of your company.

I wish you directly to enquire of Mr. Neville, who is secretary to the Duke of Bedford, *about the dancing Master belonging to the Court*. He mention'd him to me, and he is the only man for you to learn of. You may either go to

<sup>1</sup> A banker at Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Writing to Churchill on the eve of his second visit to Paris on the 26th of July, Wilkes says: "I am now planning a deep scheme for Madame Carpentier to fall into my mouth in a week," and offers to wager £100 that he will seduce her before the 1st of August. Add. MS. 30,880 B., f. 10. To refer in such terms to the lady to whom he had entrusted his daughter shows to what depths of moral turpitude he could sink on occasions.

him, or he to come to see you, as you find it best. By no means employ any other, and consult Mr. Foley in this, as in everything. I wish likewise that you wou'd soon get to the best musick-master and buy a harpsicord, the best you can.

I hope you receiv'd safe the present of French China, which I purchas'd for you the morning I left you, and wou'd convince you, I had not then, (as I never can) forgot you nor can I remember you without the highest pleasure.

I wish you to ask Madame Carpentier if England affords anything she wishes for, and I will bring it her. I please myself greatly with my summer tour.

I beg you to send the enclos'd to Mr. Foley, and to let me know what street Baron Holbach lives in. Tell the Baron I shall send to him by Mr. Stuart. Let me beg of you, my dearest girl, to write to me *in French* and *once every week*. Be so good as to begin two or three days before the post sets out, and then I shall have long letters, all the chit-chat, what you have seen, and how you like what you see.

I write no advice to you, because you have as much sense as anybody I know, and I am sure will conduct yourself in everything so as to win the esteem and love of everyone. Let me beg of you freely to write your opinion to me on everything. I have the highest opinion of you, and wish to make you happy. You have an excellent genius given you from heaven, and it will be your own pleasure to cultivate it. Read the best books and they will be your pleasure thro' life. Desire Monsieur Carpentien to buy for you *Boileau*, *Racine*, and *Molière* in small volumes; you cannot read them, as well as *Shakespeare*, *Pope*, and *Swift*, too often; yet by no means tire yourself. God has given you an excellent understanding, but the best land requires cultivation.

If anything is disagreeable to you let me know and it shall be alter'd. Pray make my best compliments to

Monsieur and Madame Carpentier, and to that good lady, whom I have seen with them.—I am ever, my dearest Polly, most affectionately yours, JOHN WILKES.<sup>1</sup>

Upon reaching London on the evening of the 11th of April, Wilkes learnt that George Grenville, who had been estranged from Lord Temple ever since he had joined the Bute ministry, was appointed Prime Minister in place of the favourite.<sup>2</sup> On the previous Saturday *The North Briton* had failed to make its appearance for the first time since it was established, No. 44, the last of the series, being published on the 2nd of April while the editor was in Paris. At the opening of Parliament, however, on the 19th of the month, the references in the King's Speech to the preliminary articles of peace induced Wilkes to fling himself once more into the fray, and he wrote "No. 45" of his paper, which was published on the 23rd of April. It was a trenchant denunciation of the speech from the Throne, but no more vitriolic than many of its predecessors, and its author was careful to declare in his opening sentence that "the King's Speech has always been considered by the Legislature, and by the public at large, as the speech of the Minister."<sup>3</sup>

Having laid down this proposition, which was justified by precedent, Wilkes proceeded to explain the reason of his displeasure—"This week has given the public the most abandoned instance of ministerial effrontery ever attempted to be imposed on mankind. The *minister's speech* of last Tuesday is not to be paralleled in the annals of this country. I am in doubt whether the imposition is greater on the Sovereign, or on the nation. Every friend of his country must lament that a prince of so many great and amiable qualities, whom England truly reveres, can be brought to

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,879, f. 8; cf. *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 22-4. Printed in full for the first time.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 13, 1763.

<sup>3</sup> *The North Briton* (1763), ii. 228.

give the sanction of his sacred name to the most odious measures and the most unjustifiable public declarations from a throne ever renowned for truth, honour, and an unsullied virtue." After protesting that the references in the King's Speech to the King of Prussia contained "an infamous fallacy," he went on to assert that "*the honour of the Crown*" was "sunk even to prostitution."<sup>1</sup>

Twice previously the prosecution of *The North Briton* had been contemplated. On the 18th of November in the preceding year a warrant had been signed by the Secretary of State for the arrest of the author, printers, and publishers of the first twenty-six numbers, but the authorities, who had failed in their indictment of Entick and Beardmore, hesitated to strike the blow, the only result of their deliberations being the extinction of Dryden Leach, who, with visions of Newgate before his eyes, refused to set up in type another syllable of the paper.<sup>2</sup> On the 18th of April following the Attorney-General was inclined to prosecute the editor of *The North Briton* for an article about the Pretender, his father, the great ex-Chancellor, Lord Hardwicke, advising him to do so.<sup>3</sup> The Government, therefore, had been merely biding its time, ready to crush the enemy when a favourable opportunity should present itself.

At last it had come. In the opinion of the Secretary of State no better pretext could be found than an article accusing the Sovereign of telling a lie. To the ministerial mind it seemed that the public belief in the veracity of the monarch was at stake, and they believed that all loyal citizens would agree that the attack upon his honour must not be allowed to go unpunished. Even had the Cabinet been undecided it is certain that the young king himself would have insisted upon a prosecution. George the Third was deeply

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton* (1763), ii. 231, 237. Cf. original issue of *The North Briton*, No. 45; Add. MS. 32,948, f. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 22,131, f. 29; Guildhall MS. 214, 4. ~ "Proofs of Authorship."

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 35,353, f. 312.

offended. For many months he had brooded in silence while *The North Briton* was reviling his dearest friend and hurling shameful insults against his mother. Living a blameless life himself, the character of John Wilkes was particularly offensive to his ideas of morality. And now, at last, this same scurrilous pamphleteer had made a most outrageous attack upon his own person, not only accusing him of a direct falsehood, but, what was an even greater offence in the eyes of "a Patriot King," insinuating that the responsibility for his acts and his declarations rested entirely with his ministers. Naturally, when the Secretaries of State resolved to issue a warrant for the apprehension of the author, printers, and publishers of "No. 45," their decision met with the hearty approval of George the Third.<sup>1</sup>

The triumvirate, who directed the policy of the Government, met in hasty conclave. Grenville, the Prime Minister, a cold, fish-like personage, with a devotion to duty as intense as that of Javert in the story, believed that he was in honour bound to make a public example of his old friend, while his colleagues, Halifax and Egremont, were burning to avenge the insult that had been offered to their royal master. All knew that Wilkes was the offender, but since the publication was anonymous the point at issue was a delicate one, and to secure absolute proof against the culprit it was necessary to proceed with caution. In the end a general warrant was drawn up, authorising the king's messengers to arrest "the authors, printers, and publishers of a seditious and treasonable paper entitled *The North Briton*, No. 45," and although the ministers suggested that it would be more prudent to insert the name of the member for Aylesbury they were over-ruled by the opinion of the

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Hardwicke*, G. Harris, iii. 341. For references at this period to the personal hostility of the king towards Wilkes, which is revealed so often at a later date in "The Correspondence of George the Third with Lord North," see Add. MSS. 32,948, ff. 201, 234, 275; 32,949, ff. 191, 366; 32,954, ff. 65, 123; 35,887, f. 77; *The Grenville Papers*, ii. 162, 192.



solicitor of the Treasury and the permanent clerks, who insisted that they could not depart from a long-established precedent.<sup>1</sup> There was no innovation in the issue of such a warrant, the Secretary of State usually adopting this method when it was necessary to summon a suspected person for examination, while in the present case the word "treasonable" was used as a special precaution, so that Wilkes could not protect himself by pleading his privilege as a member of Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

Armed with this mandate, the zealous messengers revelled in a perfect orgy of arrest, apprehending no fewer than forty-nine persons, mostly journeymen printers, in the space of three days. Dryden Leach, who had not composed a line of the obnoxious periodical since No. 26, was the first victim, being dragged from his bed at Crane Court in the early hours of Friday, the 29th of April, and everyone of his employees arrested at the same time—suspicion falling upon him because Wilkes, for whom he was reprinting a new edition of *The North Briton* in two volumes, had been recently a frequent visitor at his shop.<sup>3</sup> Later in the morning George Kearsley, the Ludgate Street bookseller, was also taken to the house of Robert Blackmore, one of the messengers, where he was detained a prisoner, while all his servants were seized and his papers confiscated as fast as the agents of the Government could lay their hands upon them.

Wilkes was much perturbed when the news of these events reached him. Long immunity made him regard himself as a chartered libertine, and he had no desire to wear a crown of martyrdom. Moreover, he had begun to hope that the authorities might think it worth while to close his mouth by other methods, it having been rumoured that he

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxix. 542; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *History of England*, J. Adolphus, i. 122; cf. Lord Hardwicke's opinion, Add. MS. 32,948, f. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 22,132, f. 71.

would be appointed Governor of Canada, a post which he would have been able to accept at that period from his old friend, George Grenville, without incurring the charge of venality.<sup>1</sup> So he hurried off to Blackmore's house, where, in the presence of the messenger, he was permitted to have an interview with Kearsley, who informed him in reproachful terms that he had been arrested for publishing the famous "No. 45." Assuming an air of confidence Wilkes endeavoured to console his unlucky henchman, telling him that it seemed "a very innocent paper," that the Opposition would "support and protect a man suffering in a good cause," and that he would go at once to Lord Chief Justice Pratt at the Court of Common Pleas and apply for a writ of habeas corpus.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after his client had departed on this errand, Kearsley was brought before the Secretaries of State, to whom in an agony of terror he admitted that the member for Aylesbury had employed him to publish *The North Briton*, the later numbers of which had been printed by Richard Balfe at the Sign of the Bell in the Old Bailey. Consequently, when Wilkes returned to the messenger's house late in the afternoon, having failed to procure the release of the publisher owing to the adjournment of the court, he learnt that the printer and his workmen had been arrested, and were at that moment being examined by the ministers. Cool and imperturbable still, although he knew now that he might be made a prisoner at any moment, Wilkes remained with the faint-hearted Kearsley for several hours, endeavouring to arouse his courage, sending out in due course for a good supper, plying him with wine, and it was twelve o'clock before he took his departure, reeling home.

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 16, May 12, 1763; cf. June 21, 1771; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 85; *Cat. of Satirical Prints* (Brit. Mus.), iv. 266; Wilkes's *Marginalia*, in *Hist. of Late Minority* (Brit. Mus.), p. 400; cf. *Life of Malone*, J. Prior, pp. 361-2. There seems to be little doubt that Wilkes had applied for the post.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes's *Marginalia*, p. 341.

according to the report of the messengers, very much the worse for liquor.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, Balfe had confessed to the Secretaries of State that he had printed "No. 45" from a manuscript supplied by John Wilkes, and Charles Yorke, the Attorney-General, and Fletcher Norton, the Solicitor-General, had been called in to give their advice. Apart from all question as to whether the paper was "treasonable" or "seditious," both the law officers were agreed that it was a libel, and since the publication of a libel was interpreted as "tending to a breach of the peace," they considered that the author could not be protected by his privilege as a member of Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Fortified by this opinion, the ministers ordered the culprit's immediate arrest, and although Lord Halifax suggested that Wilkes's name should be inserted in the warrant, which already had done duty on *three* occasions, he was over-ruled by the advice of Philip Webb, the Secretary to the Treasury, who observed that "it was better not."<sup>3</sup>

The three messengers, however, did not relish the task of apprehending a resolute gentleman like the member for Aylesbury at such a late hour, even though Lord Egremont had told them to "drag him from his bed" that night. Their leader, Nathan Carrington, "the cleverest of all ministerial terriers," happened to be unwell, and some of the others do not seem to have shown implicit loyalty to their employers. Making the excuse that it was improper to arrest Mr. Wilkes while he was "in liquor," they waited until the next day, but were on duty again at sunrise, watching all the approaches to Great George Street, so that their prisoner should not escape.

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Marginalia*, p. 345; Add. MS. 22,132, f. 74; Guildhall MSS., *passim*. We have only the doubtful authority of the messengers for the statement that Wilkes was intoxicated.

<sup>2</sup> Guildhall MS. 214, 2, vol. i. pp. 30-2. Privilege of Parliament rendered a member immune from arrest in all cases except "treason, felony, and actual breach of the peace."

<sup>3</sup> *Hist. of the Late Minority* (J. Almon), 4th imp., p. 147; *Lit. Anecdotes of Eighteenth Century*, J. Nichols, ii. 280.

At six o'clock in the morning the light-hearted Wilkes sallied forth from No. 13, dressed in his scarlet coat with jack boots and cocked hat, and he had scarcely walked a dozen paces from his home when he ran into the arms of his new acquaintance, Robert Blackmore, who was waiting for him near the corner of Little George Street. With a good-humoured smile he told him that he had an appointment with a gentleman at the Temple, but promised to come to his house at nine o'clock to breakfast with his friends Leach and Kearsley. The officer allowed him to pass, and so did James Watson, another of the messengers, who was stationed in Parliament Street, the use of a little judicious "palmistry" accounting no doubt for this complaisance.<sup>1</sup> Free for the moment from his persecutors Wilkes hurried down the Strand to Balfe's place of business in the Old Bailey. The place was locked and the officials had taken away the keys, but he secured the help of John Williams, a loyal compositor, who had managed to escape arrest, and soon the loafers in the street were amazed to see a gentleman in uniform on the highest rung of a ladder breaking through a top storey window at the Sign of the Bell, while Mrs. Balfe looked on with tacit approval. On making his way into the printing-shop he found No. 46 of *The North Briton* was already set up in type, and after hurriedly displacing "the forme," and also, it is said, tearing up the original manuscript of "No. 45," the wily editor descended by the same way that he had come, satisfied that he had done his best to baffle the Government. By half-past eight he was strolling once more along Great George Street, when he was accosted by the messengers, who told him that they had a warrant for his arrest. In a moment his demeanour had changed and he stepped back, stern and menacing, with his hand on his sword. Vowing

<sup>1</sup> Vide Robert Wood's letter to Philip Webb of June 21, Guildhall MS. 214, 3, vol. ii.; cf. *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, 10th Report, Appendix, Part I, p. 357.

that he "would put to death" the first man who attempted any violence in the street, he ordered the luckless officials to follow him home, where he promised to discuss the matter with them in private.<sup>1</sup>

The manœuvre was a crafty one on Wilkes's part, for directly he had entered his own house, where there were a couple of faithful men-servants to help him in case of need, he began to question the legality of the warrant, protesting that it was a "general warrant," which mentioned no names, and might have been served with equal justice upon the Prime Minister, or upon Lord Corke, his next-door neighbour.<sup>2</sup> In a little while, also, he managed to send word of what had happened to Lord Temple and other friends, begging them to demand his release under writ of habeas corpus at the Court of Common Pleas, on the ground that his arrest was an illegal one. Scarcely had he despatched this message when the burly Charles Churchill strolled in, unaware of the danger that threatened him, and while he was gazing with surprise at the officers of the law, Wilkes hastened to put him on his guard before he could open his lips to betray himself.

"Good morning, *Mr. Thomson*," he observed, as if he were addressing the most casual acquaintance, "how does *Mrs. Thomson* do to-day? Does she dine in the country?"

Clumsy blusterer though he was, the hint was not lost upon the sub-editor of *The North Briton*. "*Mrs. Thomson*," he replied, "was waiting for him, so he had merely called for a moment to inquire after *Mr. Wilkes's* health." Then, after a few common-place remarks he took his departure and quitted London the same day, the Government never being able to discover his hiding-place.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile Wilkes, who wished to mark time till the

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Marginalia*, pp. 345-7; Guildhall MS. 214, 2, vol. i. pp. 33-40; *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxvii. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Corke lived at No. 12 Great George Street. Vide *Court and City Register* for 1764, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxvii. 248.

writ of habeas corpus was procured, remained firm in his refusal to accompany the officers to the residence of Lord Halifax, notwithstanding the many courteous messages sent by the Secretary himself to demand his attendance. About eleven o'clock several of his friends forced their way into the house, in spite of the protests of Watson and Blackmore, who had been reinforced by two more of their comrades as well as a constable. One Humphrey Cotes was the first arrival, a wine-merchant of some notoriety, who had become a general factotum to Wilkes in the fashion of Dell of Aylesbury, a cheery, loyal soul with the face of an Apollo and the temperament of Bacchus, always dabbling in political intrigues under the guidance of Lord Temple, much to the detriment of his wine business.<sup>1</sup> Others quickly followed, among them a solicitor named Alexander Philipps, of Cecil Street, foreseeing that his friend would prove an incomparable client, and soon the house in Great George Street was filled with a clamorous little crowd who urged Wilkes to remain firm in his defiance of the Government. At length the messengers in despair were obliged to inform Lord Halifax that they required assistance, as they were being intimidated by threats; whereupon the minister requested Edward Weston, his Under-Secretary of State, to proceed at once to the scene of action in order to discover what further devilry their enemy was perpetrating. Weston, however, a timorous gentleman in a weak state of health, begged to be excused, so Robert Wood, the Under-Secretary for the Northern Department under Lord Egremont, undertook the unpleasant task.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly before one o'clock Wilkes appeared to change his mind, consenting at last to accompany the messengers to the house of the minister. No doubt his friends had assured him that he was certain to obtain his habeas corpus from the Court of Common Pleas, or indeed they

<sup>1</sup> *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1153-6.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 22,131, ff. 58, 220; Guildhall MS. 214, 3, vol. ii.

may have whispered that Chief Justice Pratt had already stigmatised the general warrant as "a most extraordinary document," which no law could authorise.<sup>1</sup> Determined that every detail of his arrest should assume the aspect of burlesque, Wilkes delivered his sword with mock solemnity to Chisholme, the constable, desiring that his sedan might be brought to the front door, although Lord Halifax's house was only at the end of the street. Then, bidding adieu to his friends, he took his seat in the chair, and escorted by a dozen messengers and attended by a curious crowd he was borne along the road in the direction of the park, peering through the glass all the while with a smile of derision, delighted at his mock triumph.

On reaching Lord Halifax's residence at the corner of Great George Street, he was ushered into a large room looking out on to Bird-cage Walk. The two Secretaries of State were sitting at a table, the faint-hearted Edward Weston standing beside his chief, while Philip Carteret Webb, the solicitor to the Treasury, and Lovell Stanhope, the law clerk, were present to give advice. Requesting his prisoner to take a seat, the genial Halifax observed that he was sorry that a gentleman of Mr. Wilkes's rank and abilities should "engage against his King and His Majesty's Government," while Lord Egremont, with his nose in the air, regarded the red-coated militia man with an expression of ineffable contempt. Not in the least abashed Wilkes replied that the king had no more zealous subject than himself, and after declaring that there never was a prince who had the misfortune to be served by such "ignorant, insolent, and despotic ministers," he threatened to impeach the Government for the outrage they had committed against the liberties of the subject in arresting him "under a General Warrant which named nobody." Having obtained the opinion of Lord Hardwicke through the medium of

<sup>1</sup> *Lives of the Chancellors*, John, Lord Campbell, v. 246; Add. MS. 32,948, f. 172.

Charles Yorke, the Secretaries of State had decided to adopt the attitude that the warrant had been employed solely for the purpose of examining a suspected man, so Lord Halifax, in a wise endeavour to avoid further argument, brought forth a paper with a long list of questions and proceeded to interrogate his captive.<sup>1</sup>

Being gifted with a sense of humour, he must have been amused, in spite of his official position, by the strategy of the pamphleteer. For Wilkes declined to answer a single question, claiming his privilege from arrest as a member of Parliament, assuring their lordships that although he admitted that their curiosity was a laudable one, "all the quires of paper on their lordships' table should be as milk-white at the end of his examination as they were at the beginning." Only once did he deign a reply, when Lord Halifax inquired if he had attended any of the dinners given by the Opposition, answering in humorous *double entente* that he did not "sit down at table, but only blew the coals."<sup>2</sup>

At length, after several hours had been wasted in this fashion, the ministers perceived that neither threats nor promises of indulgence would persuade John Wilkes to make any confession. Once he turned with a scornful squint upon Lord Egremont, who was the only foe against whom he cherished a real enmity, assuring him that even if he "employed tortures" he would not utter a single word. Anxious to treat him with all possible leniency, Lord Halifax asked whether he chose to be a prisoner in his own house, or at the Tower, or in Newgate, which elicited the tart reply that he "never received an obligation but from a friend." Upon being informed that he would be sent to the Tower, he said that he hoped they would place him in a room where no "Scotchman" had ever been a prisoner, "if," he added with a chuckle, "it is possible to find one." Then, as

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 35,353, ff. 316, 318; *Life of Lord Hardwicke*, G. Harris, iii. 343.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of Lord Rockingham*, Lord Albemarle, i. 168.



Lord Halifax rose to put an end to the conversation, Wilkes essayed a parting shot at Lord Egremont, declaring with emphasis that if the messengers had carried out the order to drag him from bed at midnight he would have "laid the first man who had entered his chamber dead upon the spot." A moment later he had recovered his temper, praising some "capital pictures" that hung on the walls.<sup>1</sup>

While the Secretaries of State were preparing a new warrant authorising two fresh messengers to deliver their prisoner into the custody of the Constable of the Tower, Wilkes was taken into another room, where he found Philip Webb engaged in a heated argument with Messrs. Walsh and Hopkins, two brother members of Parliament. These gentlemen had brought the news that Chief Justice Pratt had granted a writ of habeas corpus commanding Watson and Blackmore to bring Wilkes at once to the Court of Common Pleas in Westminster Hall, and that the document might arrive at any moment. The ministers, however, knew that they had out-manceuvred their opponents. Since the Prothonotary's office was closed they were aware that the writ could not be "served out" for some time.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it was practically a sheet of waste paper, as the prisoner was no longer in the custody of Watson or Blackmore. So, about four o'clock, on the authority of the new warrant, Wilkes was placed once more in his chair and hurried off to the Tower of London, where he was lodged in the house of Major Rainsford, the lieutenant-governor. At the same time, out of courtesy to the House of Commons, a message was sent to the Speaker to tell him what had been done.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxvii. 248-50; Guildhall MSS., *passim*; *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1153-68; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 98-105; *The North Briton* (W. Bingley, 1769), vol. i., Part I, i.-iv.; Add. MS. 22,131, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, May 5, 1763; *Collection of Genuine Papers in the Case of John Wilkes* (Paris, 1767), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, 10th Report, Appendix, Part I, p. 355.

During the whole of the afternoon No. 13 Great George Street was a scene of uproar and confusion. The officials ransacked the premises in their search for incriminating documents, while Wilkes's friends did all in their power to embarrass and obstruct them. Robert Wood paid no less than three visits to the house to see that the messengers were doing their duty, bringing Lovell Stanhope with him to superintend the collection of the papers. Cotes and Philipps followed the deputation into every room, giving vent to idle threats against the Government as each fresh drawer was broken open, and after the business in the Court of Common Pleas had been finished they were reinforced by Lord Temple himself, accompanied by Arthur Beardmore, his solicitor. Philip Webb, too, arrived on the scene soon afterwards, on a special mission from the Secretaries of State, assisting in the pillage with official zeal, unlocking various desks and cupboards with his own hands. When the keys were not forthcoming the locks were picked by a smith, every paper that was found being thrown into a sack. Within the space of an hour or two the house could not have presented a more dilapidated appearance had a gang of burglars been working there the whole night.

At last, when every room had been examined, the officials prepared to take their departure. Lord Temple was asked if he desired to be present while the papers were sealed up, but with the scornful retort that it was "too barbarous an act for any human eye to witness," he hurried away to discover how Wilkes was faring in the Tower of London. A few minutes later the rest of his noisy little band followed his example, leaving the authorities to finish their work undisturbed. The well-filled sack was placed in a coach and driven to the Treasury under the care of Messrs. Wood and Stanhope, while Philip Webb, who had been mainly responsible for the whole of this clumsy prosecution, went off to Lord Hardwicke with sore misgivings to ascertain

what that great constitutional lawyer thought of the situation.<sup>1</sup>

Although none of his friends were allowed to see him, and he was guarded by warders who never left him night or day, Wilkes remained in the best of spirits during his confinement in the Tower, overjoyed at the splendid opportunity for self-advertisement that his enemies had afforded him. One of his first tasks on the morning after his arrest was to write to his daughter, a copy of which letter he sent to the newspapers at the earliest opportunity, informing her of his imprisonment, and assuring her that he had "done nothing unworthy of a man of honour." Both on Sunday and Monday his friends made several attempts to obtain an interview with him, many of the great Whig nobles, including the Dukes of Grafton and Bolton, paying a visit to the Tower to show their disapproval of the general warrant. Major Rainsford, however, would allow no one to see his prisoner, pleading Government orders, even though Philip Webb, on being informed of the fact, was willing that Wilkes should be allowed to consult his solicitor.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the exertions to obtain an effective writ of habeas corpus still continued, application being made again to the Court of Common Pleas. Although such procedure was unusual Lord Temple and his myrmidons were well aware that Chief Justice Sir Charles Pratt, who was an old henchman of Pitt, was much more likely to be favourable to their cause than Lord Mansfield, the Government watch-dog, who presided in the Court of King's Bench. After a delay of twenty-four hours the writ was

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 107-8, 141-7; *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1153-68; *Hist. of the Late Minority* (14th imp.), pp. 158-62; *The North Briton* (W. Bingley, 1769), vol. i., Part I, i.-iv.; Add. MSS. 30,885, ff. 41-54; 35,353, f. 316; *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxiii. pp. 239-43; *Public Advertiser*, May 5, 1763.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 108-9; *Collection of Genuine Papers* (Paris, 1767), pp. 29-33.

granted, and on Tuesday the 3rd of May, at about half-past ten in the morning, Wilkes was brought from the Tower in a coach, passing over London Bridge and through St. George's Fields in his journey to Westminster Hall. On being led into court he addressed the judges in a brief but forcible speech, complaining of his "unparalleled" grievances, protesting that the liberty of an English subject should "not be sported away with impunity." The oration was received with a tumult of applause and "great clappings of hands" from a large crowd of sympathetic spectators, upon which the Lord Chief Justice threatened to commit some of the disturbers. Having listened to a long argument from Sergeant Glynn on behalf of the prisoner, the court censured the messengers for their conduct in regard to the first writ of habeas corpus, and ordered that Mr. Wilkes's friends should be allowed to visit him whenever they pleased. The proceedings came to an end soon after two o'clock, the case being adjourned until Friday, the 6th of May, and as the hero of the moment was led back to his coach the old hall rang with shouts of "Liberty! Liberty! Wilkes for ever!"<sup>1</sup>

On the appointed day the stately building was filled with a great throng, for all the town had learnt of the brave fight that the member for Aylesbury was making against the Government. Bolder than ever, for he knew that the populace had rallied to his side, he faced his judges with undaunted confidence. His voice, gruff, but sonorous, swelled loud with indignation as he recounted the indignities of which he had been the victim.

"My Lords," he cried, ". . . The liberty of all peers and gentlemen—and (what touches me more sensibly) that of all the middling and inferior set of people, who stand most in need of protection—is, in my case, this day to be

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 22,431, f. 61; 35,353, f. 325; 35,400, f. 54; *Life of Wilkes*, J; Almon, i. 109-11; *Public Advertiser*, May 4; *Collection of Genuine Papers* (Paris, 1767), p. 34.

finally decided upon; a question of such importance as to determine at once whether English liberty be a reality or a shadow. Your own free-born hearts will feel with indignation and compassion all that load of oppression under which I have so long laboured—close imprisonment, the effect of premeditative malice; all access to me for more than two days denied; my house ransacked and plundered; my most private and secret concerns divulged; every vile and malignant insinuation, even of high treason itself, no less industriously than falsely circulated by my cruel and implacable enemies, together with all the various insolence of office,—form but a part of my unexampled ill-treatment. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Not a great speech worthy of the occasion, unworthy indeed of the author of *The North Briton*, but one likely to tickle the ears of most of the listeners, for, since the man knew his audiences, the catch-phrase was his chief stock-in-trade.<sup>2</sup> All too, and especially Wilkes himself, were awaiting on tenterhooks for the decision of the Chief Justice. As soon as Sergeant Glynn, counsel for the prisoner, had stated his objections, the judge began to speak, a brisk little man with bright eyes, brimming over with self-conscious importance. In the galleries above the court the well-dressed mob of peers and politicians forgot their snuff and gossip in an instant; on the benches beneath the sturdy patriots bent forward with grim, expectant faces; the buzzing throng of shop-folk and artisans, standing behind in a dense swaying mass, became still and silent.

With obvious enjoyment and much display of gesture, Chief Justice Pratt began to deliver his opinion, dealing solely with Mr. Wilkes's commitment to the Tower, since the question of the legality of the general warrant was not at issue. Before he had finished with the first point of his argument there were many sour faces in the body of the

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Statesmen of George III*, Lord Brougham, 3rd series, p. 187.

court, while most of those in the gallery were wreathed in smiles, for the judge declared that the Secretaries of State had the same power as a magistrate to commit a suspected person to prison. Yet, though he found no fault with the *second* warrant, it was soon evident that he was summing up in favour of the popular hero, for he passed on to consider whether privilege of Parliament, which protected member from arrest in all cases except treason, felony, and breach of the peace would shield the author of *The North Briton* from the consequences of publishing a libel. It was long argument, illustrated by numerous appeals to precedent, and an hour had sped by before the final word was spoken. The verdict was one that many had dreaded but most had desired.

"We are all of the opinion that a libel is not a breach of the peace . . ." declared the Lord Chief Justice. "Mr. Wilkes is entitled to his privilege and must be discharged."

Then came the crisp, curt mandate: "Let him be discharged."<sup>1</sup>

Scarcely had Pratt pronounced his decision when the triumphant Wilkes burst forth into a second speech—brief, scarcely articulate, inadequate as before—murmuring his 'poor thanks,' praising his ingenious counsel Glynn, apostrophising the "spirit of liberty." Then, finished actor that he was, he turned about and made a low bow to the vast crowd. A mighty shout shook the rafters of the ancient hall, the scene of so many other great occasions in the nation's history, such a shout as had never been heard in that place since the acquittal of the Seven Bishops.

"Whigs for ever and no Jacobites," rose the cry, which swelled into a deep-chested roar of "Wilkes and Liberty."<sup>2</sup>

And while the popular hero was revelling in the first

<sup>1</sup> *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 987-90.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 32,948, f. 235; *Life of Hardwicke*, G. Harris, iii. 349-50. Lord Hardwicke disapproved of Pratt's judgment. Vide *Life of Hardwicke*, P. C. Yorke, iii. 466.

experiences of his new power an incident of some importance in his life was taking place a few yards distant, quite unknown to him. Crouching behind a pillar that supported one of the galleries an old artist with a round face and snub nose—a veritable little pug-dog of a man—had been making a sketch of the prisoner while the judge was delivering his address. Poor thin-skinned Hogarth was taking his revenge! A cruel revenge indeed, cruel at least to any other than the pachydermatous Wilkes, for no likeness in the world was ever limned with more unmerciful severity. All the facial ugliness was exaggerated, the swivel eye, the flat deformed nose, the heavy twisted jaw, and the portrait leers and grins and squints with an expression of spiteful mockery—craft, perfidy, and malevolence written upon every feature. It might have stood for a typical portrait of the Prince of Darkness. Ten days later it was published as an etching at the price of one shilling, and appeared in every print-shop, but the caricature failed to wound the feelings of the victim, who always made a pose of glorying in his ugliness. In after years he was often heard to remark with a merry laugh, “I am growing more like Hogarth’s portrait every day.”<sup>1</sup>

For a few moments Wilkes remained in an ante-room at the back of the court, receiving the congratulations of his friends, and then, unable to postpone the enjoyment of his triumph, he hurried through the Ordnance Office into Old Palace Yard. By his side limped a tall stooping figure with star and ribbon, pale as death, and smiling with pleasure, whispering incessantly to his companion as they walked on, while the people in the passages, recognising him, murmured to each other, “Earl Temple—the lord of Stowe.” With all his aplomb Wilkes was abashed for a moment when he came into the square and found himself

<sup>1</sup> *The Political Register*, i. 288–9; *Hogarth’s Works*, J. Ireland and J. Nichols, ii. 224; *Cat. of Sat. Prints* in Brit. Mus., iv. 278–9; *Hogarth*, Austin Dobson, p. 135.



JOHN WILKES  
*Drawn from life and etched by W. Hogarth*





in the midst of a tempestuous multitude, ten thousand strong, every man of them his loyal subjects, acclaiming him as though he were their king. Choosing to go home on foot so that all should see him, he made his way slowly through the crowded streets with a small bodyguard of friends, while the mob closed around, waving hats, blowing horns, cheering madly, everyone pressing forward to catch a glimpse of him as he passed along, grinning and bowing and squinting, the proudest and happiest man in the whole of England. On his arrival at No. 13 Great George Street he hurried upstairs into the dining-room, and, opening one of the windows, showed himself to the crowd below, who, at the sight of his cocked hat and sallow face, burst forth into a fresh tempest of acclamation. And as he gazed upon the sea of upturned faces he must have felt the glow of pride that every great man experiences when he realises for the first time that his name has become a household word on the lips of his fellow-countrymen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, May 7; *St. James's Chronicle*, May 5-7, 1763; *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxiii. 239-43; *London Magazine*, xxxii. 261-7; *Court Magazine*, 1763, p. 247; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 219-21; *Hist. of England*, J. Adolphus, i. 124-5.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PRINTING PRESS IN GREAT GEORGE STREET

1763

THE failure of the attempt to crush Wilkes had inflicted a heavy blow upon the prestige of the Government, but the whole incident also became a source of much embarrassment to the Opposition, in spite of the fact that in the three grave constitutional questions arising out of the case the Whigs were fortunate enough to find themselves on the popular side. Although all were unanimous that the general warrant had been illegal, that a writ of habeas corpus had been infringed, and that privilege of Parliament had been violated, a large number had an uneasy suspicion that it might prove a dangerous experiment to make political capital out of the woes and sufferings of the member for Aylesbury. Notwithstanding the arbitrary treatment of the popular hero, his behaviour to the king had alienated numbers of moderate men, and many a stalwart Whig feared that his extravagances would cause dissension in the ranks of the party.

Some of the leaders, indeed, almost wrung their hands in dismay over "the unfortunate affair." The superannuated Newcastle, still clinging to his chieftainship, ran hither and thither among his followers, striving to rally the disunited forces, restless and clamorous as a blundering sheep-dog whose flock is beyond his control. "Down with the ministers and God save the King," was the battle-cry of the respectables—a contradiction in terms, though Lord Hardwicke had chosen it, for George and his Government were identical in every respect. Hardwicke, himself, the

greatest of lawyers, who bestowed upon his profession the same love and veneration that a poet or a painter gives to his art, could not resist the fascination of offering secret counsel to the Government, while at the same time he was teaching his friends how to take advantage of the embarrassments of their opponents.<sup>1</sup> Under his guidance some of the magnates of the party made a display of loyalty by an ostentatious attendance at a *levée*. All of them nevertheless were loud in condemnation of the Star-Chamber methods adopted by the Secretaries of State. The "great families," led by the Dukes of Devonshire and Portland, advised moderation, but were resolved to oppose any attack upon parliamentary privilege. In the opinion of such as these No. 45 was an infamous libel, but that did not excuse a gross violation of the liberty of the subject.

The noisy minority attached to Lord Temple took a very different view. In their eyes the turbulent Mr. Wilkes was one of the most persecuted of mankind. It seemed to them that the Opposition was bound in honour to avenge his wrongs. Nor had they the slightest doubt as to the expediency of espousing his cause, all being convinced that it might be used as a means of destroying the ministry. Believing that the nation had realised at last that the principle of constitutional government was at stake, they were sure that the cry of "Wilkes and Liberty" would bring the Whigs back to their own again. Like the author himself, they protested that No. 45 was a "very innocent paper," an attack upon the Premier and his myrmidons undoubtedly, but not intended as a reflection upon his Majesty the King. Hence it was that Lord Temple had called upon all the party to make a pilgrimage to the Tower, and filled the press with lurid reports of the *cause célèbre*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 35,352, f. 350; 35,353, ff. 316, 318, 322, 324; 32,948, ff. 188, 199; 35,422, f. 255.

<sup>2</sup> For the opinions of the Whig leaders in the early stages of the Wilkes question, see "Hardwicke MSS." 35,352-3, 35,400, 35,422; Newcastle MSS. 32,948-50, *passim*.

The most powerful member of the Opposition adopted another attitude entirely. Pitt indeed held the same opinion as his fractious brother-in-law with regard to the treatment that Wilkes had suffered at the hands of the Government, but he was by no means disposed to acclaim him to the world as a martyr. Of late years his intercourse with the member for Aylesbury had almost ceased, and he regarded him, both from a social and political standpoint, as a dangerous acquaintance. Yet, though he was unwilling to help Wilkes in posing as a popular hero, he was ready to resist any attempt to curtail the privileges of Parliament or to interfere with the liberty of the press. Like Temple, he was eager to replace the Tory despotism by a ministry that was founded upon "true Revolution principles," and, contrary to the opinion of the Newcastles and Hardwickses, he agreed that this object might be accomplished by utilising the Wilkes agitation as a party weapon. Yet, unlike Temple, he was resolved not to form any connection with the agitator himself.<sup>1</sup>

Not one, however, of the great Whig magnates looked upon the situation with clear, unprejudiced eyes. The pliable Grafton, who dared to visit the Tower but shrank from offering bail to the prisoner; the wily Shelburne, who was ready to resign office because the Government had violated the constitution, but would have no truck with the man in whose person it had been violated; the insipid Rockingham, who, expecting the reversion of the leadership, regarded the Wilkes problem, like the rest of the great families, as a most unlucky entanglement, these and all the others imagined that the "principles of the Revolution" and the integrity of the Whig party were at stake. But as a matter of fact the nation cared for neither of these things. Though always eager to cheer for Pitt and howl at Bute, the mass of the people were not disposed to lament greatly

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 35,422, ff. 246, 255; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 199; *Life of Lord Shelburne*, E. Fitzmaurice, i. 299; *Chatham Correspondence*, ii. 240 n.

even though the king should choose to ostracise Whiggism for another decade. The terms Whig and Tory no longer aroused popular enthusiasm. It mattered little to either the mob or to the middle-class whether the King's Friends or the Revolution Families held possession of place and power.

With the arrest of Wilkes a new spirit had gone abroad throughout the land. In saying that the editor of *The North Briton* was "the life and soul of the Opposition," the Duke of Devonshire had enunciated a truth that was soon to be demonstrated. The farmer who groaned beneath the cider tax, the labourer who grumbled at the price of bread, the weaver who desired a rise of wages, these and all other malcontents believed that they would find a heaven-born champion of their grievances in the gay, squinting politician who was able to win a single-handed battle against all the forces of government. Perceiving how valiantly he fought for his own rights, they were convinced that he would fight as resolutely for the rights of mankind. Thus, an unexpected, and a perhaps unwelcome, greatness was thrust upon him, and he became the first leader of the new party of progress that was beginning to break away from the two old political combinations labelled Whig and Tory. "Wilkes and Liberty" was the birth-cry of British Radicalism.

While his enemy was still imprisoned in the Tower the king ordered him to be removed from the command of the Buckinghamshire militia, while the day after the triumph in the Court of Common Pleas Lord Temple was deprived of his Lord-Lieutenancy.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Wilkes also had renewed hostilities, despatching the following letter to the Secretaries of State soon after he reached home:—

MY LORDS,—On my return from Westminster Hall . . . I find that my house has been robbed, and am informed

<sup>1</sup> Guildhall MS. 214, 3, vol. ii., *vide* Letter from J. Rivers to P. C. Webb, *Grenville Papers*, ii. 55.

that the stolen goods are in the possession of one or both of your lordships. I therefore insist that you do forthwith return them.

To this frivolous badinage the ministers retorted that the king had ordered the Attorney-General to take legal proceedings, instructions to that effect being conveyed to Charles Yorke in a letter from Lord Halifax two days later.<sup>1</sup> Yorke, however, was in constant communication with his father, Lord Hardwicke, who watched every incident in the strange cause with infinite care, feeling each thread of the tangled web with a superfine touch like a placid old spider—to which Hogarth had compared him; and Yorke soon found himself entangled in a network of red tape. The dread of setting the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas by the ears began to haunt him. Privilege of Parliament, too, was an intricate problem, the Commons being as jealous as a woman of their accustomed prerogatives. It seemed the wisest course in the opinion of the law officers, and "the triumvirate" acquiesced, to wait until the House was sitting, when it would be possible to crush Wilkes by censure or impeachment with the aid of the Government majority. So though "an information was exhibited" against the author of *The North Briton*, Wilkes evaded it by pleading his privilege, and the ministers hesitated to proceed further, a humiliating predicament for an impetuous young king, whose mother had been slandered and whose dearest ambitions were thwarted by a bankrupt libertine.<sup>2</sup>

Far from being dismayed by the threat of a Government prosecution, Wilkes applied to Sir John Fielding at Bow Street as soon as he received the ministerial reply to demand

<sup>1</sup> Hardwicke MS. 35,887, f. 77. Record Office Papers *re* John Wilkes, vol. i. p. 280, No. 394.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 32,948, f. 371; 32,949, f. 191; 35,422, f. 246; *Historical Gleanings*, J. E. Thorold Rogers, p. 160; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 72; *Journals of House of Commons*, xxix. 667; *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers* (Paris, 1767), p. 53; *Life of Lord Hardwicke*, P. C. Yorke, iii. 498.

a warrant to search for his stolen papers at the houses of the Secretaries of State. Naturally the blind magistrate declined to interfere, whereupon the applicant, in order to impress the multitude, feigned indignation.

"You refuse me, sir," he thundered, "then, sir, you shall hear from me."<sup>1</sup>

This, however, was the last of his idle threats, and he plunged into a fresh campaign against the Government, reckless as a school-boy who has discovered a new method of mischief. No printer was now willing to run the risk of working for him, so he proceeded to set up a press of his own at No. 13 Great George Street, one John Yallowby, on the recommendation of Dryden Leach, erecting two presses for him at a cost of twenty-eight pounds.<sup>2</sup> In three days the work was finished, and a couple of journey-men printers engaged, one of whom, named Michael Curry, had been arrested by the king's messengers as a suspected person on the memorable 29th of April. At first Wilkes intended to publish an account of his prosecution written by himself, advertising in the newspapers for subscribers, but his admirers seemed to consider that it was foolish to pay a guinea for information they had received already and the contributions proved inadequate.<sup>3</sup> The Great George Street Press, however, was soon busy with other enterprises. An affidavit relating to a Government loan was the first book printed, followed immediately by Lord Temple's pamphlet on the seizure of papers in the form of "A Letter to Lords Halifax and Egremont."<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of May, in an unlucky moment, while undecided as to his next publication, Wilkes set his foreman, Michael Curry, to work upon the "Essay on Woman," giving him strict orders to strike off only twelve

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 32,948, f. 252; *Nollekens and His Times*, J. T. Smith (1895), pp. 125-6.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 22,132, f. 111; Guildhall MSS. 214, 2, vol. i. 214, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, May 26-28, 1763.

<sup>4</sup> Add. MS. 22,132, f. 111; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 81 n.



copies and to allow no one to read a word of the poem. He was anxious to print the parody for his friends, who had been disappointed by Kearsley's failure to finish the volume, while the task also had the advantage of keeping a highly paid workman from idleness. Moreover, it was desirable to show exactly that the verses were intended merely for private publication, as it seemed probable that the original manuscript as well as the imperfect proofs had been seen by Messrs. Wood and Webb when they made their famous seizure of papers.<sup>1</sup> The frontispiece, "curiously engraved on copper" by Mr. Tringham, had been ready since the previous October, and in a week or two about one-fourth of the vicious poem was set up in type, twelve copies being printed in red ink for distribution among a few intimate friends. Since it was first composed it had been considerably embellished by Wilkes himself, if not entirely revised, and gibes at the expense of Bute and Hogarth were cleverly interpolated.<sup>2</sup>

The title-page ran as follows :

An | Essay on Woman. | By Pego Borewell Esq. | With  
Notes by Rogerus Cunnaeus, Vigerus Mutoniatus, etc.,  
And | A Commentary by the Rev. Dr. Warburton. | In  
scribed to Miss Fanny Murray. | "Ὡς οὐκ αἰνότερον καὶ  
κύτερον ἄλλο γυναικὸς. — Hom. Od. xi. 426 | ΣΩΤΗΡ  
ΚΟΣΜΟΥ. | In recto decus. | Ex Archetypo sæpe in

<sup>1</sup> On the 10th of May, thinking that copies of the poem might have been seized by the messengers, Wilkes had inserted the following advertisement in the *Public Advertiser* : "Speedily will be published, 'An Essay on Woman,' by P. C. Webb."

<sup>2</sup> Guildhall MS., "A Genuine Account of the Proceedings against Mr. Wilkes for being the Author, &c., of the 'Essay on Woman,'" p. 18; Add. MSS. 22,132, ff. 217 *et seq.*; 30,885, ff. 150-8; *The North Briton* (W. Bingley), vol. ii., Part I, pp. 93-6; *Journals of the House of Lords*, xxx. 416; *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxiv. 583; *An Essay on Woman* (London, 1871), pp. i.-iv.; *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, iv. 1, 4; 10th series, ix. 442; xi. 493; Mr. Eric R. Watson in 11th series, ix. 121-3, 143-5, 162-3, 183-5, 203-5, 222-3, 241-2. *Public Advertiser*, May 10, 1763.

femoralibus Reverendissimi Georgii Stone, | Hiberniæ Primatis, sæpius in podice Intrepidi Herois | Georgii Sackville. | <sup>1</sup>

A prose introduction, entitled "Advertisement by the Editor," followed, in which George Stone, Archbishop of Armagh, was lampooned once more, while a sarcastic reference to Hogarth makes it evident that Wilkes had written his preface since his quarrel with the painter. In a second introduction, called "The Design," there was a coarse reference to Bishop Warburton and his wife.

Of the actual poem, which was a close parody of Pope's "Essay on Man," only ninety-four lines were set up in type, struck off on nine pages, each containing ten or eleven lines, together with the famous notes of the apocryphal commentator.<sup>2</sup> Then came the other parodies, all obscene and blasphemous, "The Universal Prayer," "The Dying Lover," and "Veni Creator." Probably it was these effusions that had amused the Great Commoner a few years before.

On the 20th of June, contrary to the advice of Lord Temple, who had disapproved of the printing-press from the first, Wilkes decided to reprint *The North Briton* in volume form, so the type of the "Essay on Woman" was distributed, and four new journeymen were engaged to help Curry and his assistant in their new work. It was a rash enterprise, as the most sagacious friends of the patriot hastened to point out. So far there was no direct proof that he was the author of "No. 45," the testimony of Balfe and Kearsley before the Secretaries of State not having been given on oath, and it was probable that Balfe and Kearsley, if Lord Temple made it worth their while, would be willing to miti-

<sup>1</sup> The reference to Sackville shows that the frontispiece could not have been written till 1759.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Eric Watsoff has pointed out to me the probable number of lines on each page of the original edition; *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, ix. 183-5.

gate much of their previous evidence. Undoubtedly he was actuated mostly by vanity, boasting that "*North Briton* and Wilkes will be talked of together by posterity," and although he could obtain only 120 subscribers, he printed two thousand copies of his famous periodical in two small octavo volumes. These contained the whole forty-six papers with a set of notes, and a third volume including several documents relating to the prosecution was completed in due course. On the title-page the name of J. Williams, "near the Mitre Tavern, Fleet Street," appeared as the publisher, the same Williams who had helped Wilkes to break into Balfe's printing-shop on the morning of his arrest. By the 17th of July the work was finished, and the member for Aylesbury found that he was much out of pocket by the venture, Lord Temple, as usual, being called upon to make up the deficiency in his banking account.<sup>1</sup>

When he had accomplished his arduous task Wilkes's thoughts began to turn towards Paris, his promised visit to his daughter having been postponed long after the appointed time by the reprinting of *The North Briton*. Ever since his release from the Tower he had revelled in the delights of his newly-acquired fame, almost every day bringing a fresh tribute of popular applause. Upon his first visit to his constituency after his arrest, the pretext being a well-advertised entertainment in honour of the king's birthday on the 4th of June, he received an uproarious welcome from his fellow-townsmen, who flocked out to meet him many miles down the London road, and having brought

<sup>1</sup> "J.T.Y." in *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, viii. 101, ix. 104-6; Martin's *Cat. of Privately Printed Books*, p. 40; Add. MSS. 22,132, ff. 271-2; 35,400, ff. 83, 101, 108; 30,868, f. 40; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 75. Wilkes printed two other volumes at his private press, namely *Recherches sur L'Origine du Despotisme Oriental*, ouvrage postume de M. Boulanger. Vide John Martin in *Notes and Queries*, 1st series, xii. 102; Add. MS. 30,868, f. 101; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 81; and "The Battle of Epsom," a poem by Mr., afterwards Sir Joseph, Mawbey. Vide Add. MS. 22,132, f. 111; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 81.

him in triumph into Aylesbury, every man of them continued to drink to "Wilkes and Liberty" as long as he was able to lift a tankard.<sup>1</sup> When some of the printers who had been arrested under the general warrant brought an action against the messengers in the Court of Common Pleas, financed and instigated by Lord Temple, the presence of Wilkes appeared to give as much satisfaction to the people as the verdict in favour of the journeymen, and he was cheered to the echo by the crowds that were gathered outside the Guildhall where the cause was tried.<sup>2</sup>

In the City of London, without whose support no political cause was ever won, he had a large following, and many influential liverymen became his most loyal supporters. The paragraphs in the continental newspapers, endorsed by letters from correspondents abroad, proved to him beyond doubt that he had gained a European reputation; while, had he known it, he would have been prouder still to learn that his case had aroused the deepest interest in the American colonies, where the cry of "Wilkes and Liberty" reminded local patriots that vigorous methods were required to win freedom.<sup>3</sup> Conscious of the great part that he was playing, his courage never faltered in spite of the rumours that he was to be expelled from the House of Commons and prosecuted for a seditious libel in the Court of King's Bench. And though ostensibly he hurled his glove at the ministers, he was aware that it was to his sovereign himself that he offered challenge.

"I hear from all hands that the King is enraged at my insolence, as he terms it," he confessed in a letter to Lord Temple. "I regard not his frowns nor his smile. I will ever be his faithful subject, never his servant. . . . Hypocrisy, meanness, ignorance, and insolence characterise the

<sup>1</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, June 4-7; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, July 7, 8, 11; *Chatham Correspondence*, ii. 233; *Life of Lord Hardwicke*, G. Harris, iii. 365.

<sup>3</sup> *Boston News Letter*, June 23, Oct. 20, 1763, Feb. 16, 1764; *Boston Gazette*, Feb. 20, 1764; cf. *Grenville Papers*, ii. 138.

king I obey. My independent spirit will never take a favour from such a man. I know that I have neither the lust of power nor of money : and if I leave my daughter less dirty coin, I will leave her more honest fame. I trust, next to her own virtue, her greatest honours will be derived from her father.”<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile he had been kept under strict surveillance by the Government, Nathan Carrington and his spies following his movements day by day. Little by little significant rumours with regard to the productions of his printing-press reached the ears of the authorities. For the sake of secrecy the first two printers had been boarded and lodged at 13 Great George Street, but this precaution became futile when additional workmen were required. A traitor very soon appeared. Samuel Jennings, the last of the four journeymen engaged to help Curry and Carey to print *The North Briton*, turned informer, and before the middle of July or thereabouts Philip Webb had learnt of the existence of the “Essay on Woman.” From that moment the Treasury officials used every endeavour to obtain a copy of the poem, offering all manner of alluring promises to the printers, pursuing them until, by persuading another to turn traitor, the booty had been obtained.

Naturally, the betrayers sought to excuse their treachery by representing themselves as the victims of accident, and the stories of all of them were full of falsehood. Jennings himself protested that he picked up a fragment of a proof sheet from the floor of Wilkes’s printing-room, which he showed in perfect innocence to Thomas Farmer, who had formerly been his fellow-workman. Farmer is said to have laid the sheet before his overseer, Lionel Hassall, and Hassall, shocked at its indecency, immediately took counsel with their employer, William Fadan, the Scottish printer of Fleet Street. Fadan, anxious to seize the chance of doing a service to the Government, sought the advice

<sup>1</sup> *Grenville Papers*, ii. 73-4.

of the Rev. John Kidgell, a clerical friend, who, being chaplain to Lord March, was able to obtain access to the authorities. Eager to possess any paper that might strengthen the case against their enemy, the Treasury officials sent word to the Fadan-Kidgell gang that they must procure a copy of the whole poem, and consequently Hassall, Farmer, and Jennings were urged to solicit Michael Curry, Wilkes's trusted foreman, to give them what they required. For many weeks the man remained staunch to his employer, resisting every bribe, assuring the tempters that he did not possess a proof sheet of the parody, although in fact he had printed one or two extra copies to keep for himself. Towards the end of July, Wilkes went to Paris for a couple of months, and hearing, soon after his return, that the ministers were aware that he had printed the "Essay on Woman" at his private press, he suspected Curry of having betrayed him.<sup>1</sup> The man, already dissatisfied with the way his master had treated him, was dismissed from his employment, whereupon, in revenge, he handed over a set of revised proofs—including the title-page, prefaces, and the unfinished poem, together with the other three parodies—to the emissaries of the Government.<sup>2</sup> Such was the story put forth by Messrs. Curry, Farmer, Jennings and Co., and corroborated by the authorities, who strove vainly to convince the world that they were not guilty of the meanness of bribing a servant to betray his master.

From the 20th of July to the 26th of September Wilkes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Add. MS. 35,400, f. 124.

<sup>2</sup> *A Genuine and Succinct Narrative*, John Kidgell; *A Full and Candid Answer*, by a Friend of Truth; *An Expostulatory Letter to the Rev. Mr. Kidgell*; *A Letter to J. Kidgell, containing a full answer to his Narrative*; *The Plain Truth*, by Thomas Farmer; *Journals of the House of Lords*, xxx. 415-22; Add. MSS. 22,132, ff. 217-93; 30,868, ff. 36, 40, 50; *The North Briton* (W. Bingley), vol. i., Part I, pp. lxxi.-ix., vol. ii., Part I, pp. 93-6; *Political Register*, iii. 109; "H.G.D." in *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, iv. 113; Guildhall MS. 214, 2, vol. i., vide "A Genuine Account," &c., *et passim*; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 140, 152, 156, ii. 9-11, 63, iii. 113-16; *An Essay on Woman* (London, privately printed, 1871); *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, Pisanus Fraxi, pp. 198-236.

was absent from London, paying a visit to his daughter in Paris. Notwithstanding his devotion to the girl, which peeps forth in almost every incident of his life, there were other attractions in the gay French capital that monopolised a considerable portion of his time during these two months. In a letter to Churchill he boasted of the "carnaval" of gallantry that he was enjoying. The satellites of the inspector of police noted, as was their custom, that he sometimes took supper at Brissault's, a rival establishment to the celebrated Hôtel du Roule, with certain dainty lights of love such as Mlle. L'Etoile and Mlle. Sainte-Foix.<sup>1</sup> There were rumours also of an amour with an opera dancer. Yet in spite of these frailties, which were part of the man's nature, he passed on the whole a very innocent holiday in the company of his thirteen-year-old Polly, indulging her every whim, buying whatever she took a fancy for, escorting her whither she desired. And while taking these excursions, as he contrasted the gaiety and wealth of Paris with the wretchedness and poverty of the provinces, he made the startling prophecy that France was on the eve of a great revolution.<sup>2</sup>

One notorious incident happened during the visit. On the 15th of August, as he was leaving the Hôtel de Saxe in the Rue du Colombier, accompanied by Lord Palmerston, a festive nobleman who was as gay a Lothario as himself, he was accosted in the street by a gentleman in military uniform.

"Are you Mr. Wilkes?" demanded the stranger, but recognising, perhaps, the Scottish accent the popular hero made no response.

"Are you the celebrated Mr. Wilkes?" the officer repeated, whereat the other, tickled by the compliment, acknowledged his identity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Le Journal des Inspecteurs de M. de Sartine*, pp. 307, 315.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,878, f. 32; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 100.

<sup>3</sup> *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 226.

In a burst of wrath the soldier retorted that Wilkes had abused his country in *The North Briton* and must fight him. Not wishing to be drawn into a quarrel with a stranger, Wilkes replied with a playful smile that there was no evidence that he was the author of the paper, adding that the young Scotsman was delivering judgment upon a question that was puzzling the greatest lawyers in England. Perceiving, however, that the other meant mischief, he reminded him that gentlemen were not in the habit of squabbling in the street, and naming his address he turned on his heel and walked away.

At six o'clock the next morning the officer called at the Hôtel de Saxe and was shown into Wilkes's room, a comfortable apartment on the ground floor. Producing a card, he said that he was Captain John Forbes of Skellater, a Scottish exile in the French service,<sup>1</sup> and persisted in his intention of fighting the man who had "wrote against his country." Still refusing to regard the matter as serious, Wilkes answered that he did write occasionally such things as "receipts for tenants and sometimes on post-nights," but that he would give no account to Mr. Forbes or any other man.

The young Scotsman repeated that they must fight that very day, and Wilkes, seeking to find some reasonable excuse for declining such a ridiculous combat, protested that he was not at liberty to give satisfaction to anyone else until he had settled his account with Lord Egremont. Finally, he reminded Captain Forbes that under any circumstances the question of fighting ought not to be discussed by them but by their seconds.

This was exactly what the headstrong Forbes was anxious to avoid, wishing to settle the matter in the French style, the sword-thrust following the challenge on the instant,

<sup>1</sup> *The Scottish Nation*, ii. 234; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 223 n.; *St. James's Chronicle*, Oct. 1-4, 1763. Captain Forbes's father had fought for the Pretender in '45.



knowing that the stern laws against duelling were less severe to a sudden brawl than to a pre-arranged contest in cold blood. So he paid another visit to the Hôtel de Saxe later in the morning, hoping no doubt to discover his enemy alone, instead of which he found him sitting with his friend Goy, a merry little Frenchman. Wilkes refused to fight unless the challenger produced a second, and Forbes, after promising to do so, made another call a few moments afterwards, endeavouring in vain to provoke an informal combat. Early in the afternoon, however, a rumour of the intended duel came to the ears of the authorities, the Englishman's friends taking this method of preventing the encounter, and Wilkes, being summoned to appear before the marshals of France, was compelled to give his parole to preserve the peace. At the same time an order was issued for the arrest of Captain Forbes, who, with visions of the Bastille before his eyes, fled to England.<sup>1</sup>

When news of the affair reached Wilkes's enemies in London they did not scruple to accuse him of cowardice, insinuating that he had prompted his friends to communicate with the French marshals in order to put his persistent antagonist under lock and key. Possibly he may have taken this means of ridding himself of a tiresome intruder, but as soon as he learnt that his courage had been called in question his attitude entirely changed. During the third week in August the Earl of Egremont died suddenly, and Wilkes, declaring that he was now free to meet Forbes, tried by every means in his power to get into communication with the Scotsman. Although his friends endeavoured to convince him of the absurdity of accepting a challenge from a casual swashbuckler with whom he had no legitimate quarrel, he sent an intimation to his antagonist that he

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to and from Mr. Wilkes* (1769), pp. 41-54; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1763), pp. 412, 424, 449; *London Magazine*, xxxii. 449, 516, 549; *Public Advertiser*, Aug. 25-31, Sept. 21; *St. James's Chronicle*, Sept. 15-17; Add. MS. 35,400, f. 113; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 366.

would fight him at Menin in Austrian Flanders on the 21st of September. The duel, however, never took place. Either Captain Forbes did not receive the message or he was persuaded to ignore it, for he accepted a commission in the Portuguese army, and had sailed for Lisbon before Wilkes had set out from Paris to meet him in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup>

The death of Lord Egremont—"Il m'a joué un vilain tour," was Wilkes's comment on the event—not only deprived the patriot of a *bête noire* for whose blood he thirsted, but also nearly caused the dismissal of the rest of his ministerial enemies. For the king, weary of George Grenville and his colleagues, opened negotiations with Pitt, endeavouring to persuade him to form a new Government. The terms demanded by the Great Commoner, however, were too arbitrary, and the administration consequently remained unchanged, Lord Sandwich, a laborious peer who regarded details as more essential than results, being appointed to the vacant Secretaryship.

The new minister was an intimate of John Wilkes, having been a fellow-member of the Beef Steak Club for two years, and also, if rumour spoke truly, one of the Medmenham fraternity, a good-humoured, tolerant soul and a loyal friend. Naturally averse to treat his old acquaintance as severely as his predecessor had done, he made overtures to the patriot as soon as he returned from France, offering on behalf of the Government to forego the intended prosecution if Wilkes would consent to make suitable terms of peace.<sup>2</sup> The olive branch was rejected with scorn, Wilkes protesting that he had devoted himself to the service of the Opposition and would accept no favours from the ministry,

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,878, ff. 32, 34, 36; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 99, 112, 124; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 213-23; *Public Advertiser*, Sept. 22 and 23.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 32,951, f. 220. Modern writers have made many absurd statements with reference to Sandwich's alleged treachery to Wilkes. Philip Webb had completed his plans for obtaining a copy of the "Essay on Woman" before Sandwich became Secretary of State.

making it clear that as far as he was concerned the battle would be fought out to the bitter end.

Having failed to conciliate his combative friend, Lord Sandwich was obliged to adopt the views of his colleagues, having no alternative, short of tendering his resignation, but to carry out the king's wishes with regard to the punishment of Wilkes. Even if a sense of duty had not impelled him to proceed with the prosecution, there was good reason why the friendship between the two old comrades should have cooled. For among the papers that were seized at Great George Street, and still retained by the solicitor of the Treasury, was a ribald lampoon at the expense of Lord Sandwich in Wilkes's own handwriting, and evidently intended for publication, which satirised the minister in a style that it was impossible to forgive.<sup>1</sup> Written a few months previously when the earl had been nominated Ambassador at Madrid, and almost as unsavoury as the "Essay on Woman," it must have caused the new Secretary of State intense annoyance when he discovered it among the documents that Philip Webb submitted to him. In one scornful paragraph Wilkes had even impugned his courage. "It is beneath your lordship to measure swords with the men, and we do most expressly restrain you to make all your thrusts at the women. . . ." After perusing the satire Lord Sandwich must have regarded its composition as a most unfriendly act, and he was able to devote himself to the task of impeaching Wilkes with an easy conscience.

<sup>1</sup> Guildhall MS. 214, 1, vol. 3. "Instructions for our trusty and well-beloved John, Earl of Sandwich, our Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Most Catholic King, given at our Sublime Court, Covent Garden."



JOHN MONTAGUE, EARL OF SANDWICH  
*the original picture in the possession of the Trinity House, London, by J. Zoffany,  
engraved by J. Green*



## CHAPTER IX

### THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY WAR

1763

PARLIAMENT met on Tuesday, the 15th of November. For many weeks the whole nation had been looking forward to this day, as though a decisive battle in foreign warfare was to be lost or won. All were aware that there had been few contests in the history of England upon which graver issues had depended, since the fight between the Opposition and the Ministry over the body of John Wilkes would decide whether the king or Parliament was henceforth to control the destinies of the people. Dense crowds were gathered in the court-yards outside the old Palace of Westminster. Members of both Houses thronged the long corridors within, each party having mobilised its forces for the great fight. There was an atmosphere of unaccustomed excitement everywhere. Each face was aglow with expectation ; all hurried to and fro with quick eager footsteps.

Long before the Speaker took his seat every bench was filled in the chapel of St. Stephen's, where the Commons assembled, and members were standing along its panelled walls. Although not as notable an assembly as some of the Parliaments that had gone before and came soon after, it still contained the most noble figure that ever entered those doors. He sat amidst his colleagues of the Opposition this great William Pitt, grim and aloof, unconscious of the incessant glances that were cast upon him, a tall gaunt man in ill-fitting clothes, and though the shadow of pain and sickness rested upon his cheeks and he leant for-

ward in his seat with the stoop of the valetudinarian, the gleam of his blue eyes revealed the unquenchable fire that glowed within his breast, and the fierce curved nose and stern mobile lips gave an impression of power and virility to his pale face. Across the House his brother-in-law, the Premier, bent over a sheaf of notes, a silent, bloodless man with a hacking cough, his firm mouth and tilted nostrils indicating the proud Grenville obstinacy, and while he had none of Pitt's fiery eloquence, his clear logical speeches made him one of the most formidable of debaters.

By his side on the Treasury bench sat a plump young Under-Secretary with a round red face and goggle eyes, Lord North by name, in likeness almost the twin brother of the king, who had been chosen against his will to take a leading part in the debates on Mr. Wilkes, being a talented orator in spite of a thick slobbering utterance, and one of the most amiable and respected of the ministers. The vacillating Charles Yorke was now to be seen among the Opposition, having resigned the Attorney-Generalship so as to be free to take the Seals when Pitt should come into his own again, since he believed the Woolsack must revert to him by hereditary right; but though he had inherited a large share of his father's intellect, it was evident that sloth and self-indulgence had set their seal upon his bloated features, the lusts of the flesh preventing him from taking rank amongst the greatest. Though gifted with inferior parts, the gruff, heavy-jowled Sir Fletcher Norton, who was occupying Yorke's place among the ministers, had proved a far more valuable henchman to the Government, being the toughest of stubborn Tories, brave, iron-cast, and insolent, ready at any moment to fling himself into a debate and overwhelm an opponent in a storm of vituperation.

Seated among the leaders of the Opposition, the handsome Charles Townshend prattled gaily to his friends, careless and irresponsible, feeling the importance of the

occasion less than any member of the House, dismaying his colleagues by assuring them that he "held Wilkes in abhorrence" and would not speak on his behalf, a grievous loss to the critics of the Government, since not even the Great Commoner had a more fertile imagination or a more eloquent tongue. The inflexible General Conway, seeming as though he were encased in buckskin and pipe-clay, wore a look of grave anxiety, for he had reached a high position among his fellow-members by his robust fluency and lofty character, and since he knew that conscience might compel him to vote against his party, it appeared probable that the king's resentment would cause him to lose all that he had gained.

A stranger in one of the galleries that ran on either side of the chamber, supported by slender pillars, might have detected many other well-known faces. The black broad-shouldered man with a wild rolling eye and the lump upon his cheek where a bullet lay buried beneath the flesh is Isaac Barré, who served under Wolfe on the heights of Abraham, an honest swashbuckler with a voice like a bull, but a greater orator than any save Pitt and Townshend. On the other side of the House William Dowdeswell's homely face and clumsy figure may be seen, the centre of a group of earnest Whigs, a safe business-like politician without guile or ostentation, whose common-sense and integrity have raised him to the front rank. Not far away sits William Beckford, the dictator of the city of London, a showy, pretentious merchant with a hooked nose and the bold aggressive eye of the plutocrat, whose smart clothes seem ill-suited to his uncouth demeanour, but a person of the first importance to his party, for he is the trusted henchman of Pitt and one of the greatest magnates in the financial world. It is easy to recognise the pleasant Scottish features of Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto, one of the most powerful of ministerial orators, and the sallow melancholy face of Sir George Savile, an incorruptible patriot, whose



word is law throughout the wide county of York. There are some notable men, too, in that assembly whose fame has not been won in politics. The plump gentleman with demure lips and a habit of showing the whites of his eyes is the celebrated George Selwyn, the member for Gloucester, who ranks with Foote, Wilkes, and Chesterfield as a sayer of good things; while the tall, supercilious person with a thin oval face and the gestures of a dancing-master is Horace Walpole of Strawberry Hill, and although his contemporaries regard him as an eminent connoisseur, they would have been much startled by the idea that he would be better known to posterity than any other man in that assembly.

The Speaker had taken his seat, the new members had been sworn at the table, and the clerk was about to open the session by reading a Bill, when Wilkes sprang to his feet, brisk and defiant, to make his complaint of breach of privilege. At the same instant the Prime Minister rose to deliver a message from the king, while Speaker Cust protested feebly that nothing could be done till the Bill had been read according to precedent. A long debate ensued, stormy and acrimonious, lasting nearly five hours, till six o'clock—in reality a preliminary skirmish between Government and Opposition, to ascertain whether members still retained their time-honoured reverence for the sacred question of privilege. Pitt and the Whigs contended that it ought to take precedence of everything else, but the king's friends, who had been marshalled in overwhelming force, vanquished their opponents on the division of 300 votes to 111, which indicated that only one hundred and eleven stalwart Commons were prepared to do battle on behalf of the member for Aylesbury.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister then delivered the royal message,

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 250; *Parliamentary History*, xv. 1354-5; *Caldwell Papers*, Part II, vol. i. p. 200; *Life and Times of Ralph Allen*, R. E. M. Peach, pp. 191-2.

a plain unvarnished statement, explaining that John Wilkes had avoided imprisonment by pleading the privilege of Parliament and requesting the House to consider the whole case. After "a humble address" had been voted, returning thanks to his Majesty for his gracious message, the papers which George Grenville had laid upon the table were read aloud—"No. 45," and the evidence of Richard Balfe and George Kearsley—documents that most members knew already off by heart. Lord North followed with the motion that was to open the full-dress debate of the day, a motion that stigmatised *The North Briton*, No. 45, as "a false, scandalous, and seditious libel, containing expressions of the most unexampled insolence and contumely towards His Majesty . . . tending to alienate the affections of the people . . . and to excite them to traitorous insurrections against His Majesty's Government."<sup>1</sup>

During the next eight hours the House of Commons wrangled vehemently over textual definitions, disputing incessantly whether such epithets as "false" and "traitorous" could be applied with justice to "No. 45," but in spite of these banalities the debate was as memorable as any in its annals, since it struck the key-note that was to dominate the most eventful reign in the history of Great Britain. All through the long evening Pitt as usual retained the centre of the stage, throwing his whole soul into the struggle, since he knew that the supremacy of Parliament was at stake, and, while approving all the anathemas that had been heaped upon *The North Briton*, he maintained that the Government had violated the liberty of the subject and preached a score of sermons from this text. Among the ministers Norton occasionally was able to come to grips with their great antagonist in rough bull-dog fashion, heedless of punishment or where he fastened his teeth, but

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxix. 667-8; *Parliamentary History*, xv. 1356-9; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 385; Add. MS. 32,952, ff. 349-51.

Lord North, with the knowledge that three hundred members were at his command, was content to roll forth platitudes on the subject of treason and sedition. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning before the division was taken, when it was resolved by 273 votes to 111 that No. 45 was "a false, scandalous, and seditious libel," and it was ordered to be burnt by the Common Hangman.

Now and then during the long debate Wilkes had enlivened the House by a pert remark, and he was permitted also to state his complaint, making a brief, incisive speech, describing the indignities that he had suffered at the hands of the Government.<sup>1</sup> In his last sentence he astonished everyone by offering to make a fair and reasonable compromise with his enemies, promising that if his fellow-members would declare that he was entitled to privilege he would consent to waive his rights and submit himself to trial by jury. A thrilling incident took place late in the evening before the vote was taken, when Samuel Martin, ex-Secretary to the Treasury and M.P. for Camelford, who had been described as "a mean, abject, low-lived, and dirty fellow" in *The North Briton* on the previous 5th of March, delivered a set oration denouncing his libeller. Glaring at Wilkes and speaking in a voice that thrilled with passion, he declared that he had been grossly abused in the infamous paper.

"A man capable of writing in that manner," he continued savagely, "without putting his name to it and thereby stabbing another in the dark, is a cowardly rascal, a villain, and a scoundrel," and lest his intention might not be evident, he repeated the words with greater emphasis.

A hundred eyes were turned upon Wilkes, who sat smiling and imperturbable, wholly indifferent to the studied insult. Any other man would have answered the affront with a

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 4-7; *History of Late Minority*, pp. 227-33; *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers* (Paris, 1763), p. 51; *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 17, 1763; *Chatham Correspondence*, ii. 261; *Letters to and from Lord Malmesbury*, i. 100.

few hot words of defiance, suggesting a meeting on the morrow. For a moment the House was amazed, and then recalling *l'affaire Forbes*, most of those present began to suspect that Wilkes must be a poltroon after all.<sup>1</sup>

While the Commons were condemning *The North Briton* the Government had been conducting a fresh campaign against their enemy in the House of Lords, using the stolen copy of the "Essay on Woman" as a means of assailing him. As usual, it was the king who was the instigator of the attack, for he had instructed Lord Sandwich to prosecute the author of the indecent poem as soon as he heard of its capture.<sup>2</sup> At first it was difficult to decide the *modus operandi*, Lord Chancellor Northington, an unrepentant old reprobate, mindful perhaps of his own unholy past, deeming it impolitic to condemn an unpublished work for its grossness and impiety, but eventually it was agreed that William Warburton, now Bishop of Gloucester, might bring forward a complaint, because his name was mentioned on the title-page.<sup>3</sup> The secret had been guarded most zealously, and when Parliament met only two or three members of the Cabinet were aware of the new peril that awaited the tempestuous John Wilkes.

About one o'clock in the afternoon, when the king, who opened Parliament in person, had retired from the House of Lords and the Commons had returned to St. Stephen's to commence their long debate on the subject of "No. 45," Lord Sandwich revealed the surprise that he had prepared for his fellow-peers. Assuming the pose of virtuous indignation, in a voice that thrilled with pious horror, the new Secretary of State informed the House that John Wilkes had published an obscene and blasphemous poem, some passages of which he proceeded to read aloud. In spite of their

<sup>1</sup> *Caldwell Papers*, Part II, vol. i. p. 202; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 386.

<sup>2</sup> *A Selection from the Unpublished Papers of William Warburton*, F. Kilvert, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> *Grenville Papers*, ii. 154.

amazement at this new specimen of ministerial craft, the humour of the situation was not lost upon the audience, for the orator himself was a notorious rake, whose repertoire of ribald songs was the delight and pride of the Sublime Society of Beef Steaks. Dashwood, the Franciscan, whispered to his neighbour that it was the first time that he had heard the devil preaching, and many other peers, knowing that Sandwich would have chuckled over the verses had Wilkes read them to him in private, considered that he was guilty of an act of treachery to his old friend.

Quite unperturbed, his large heavy face more solemn than usual, the minister plodded through his task, quoting extracts and delivering homilies in his slow, laborious style, and although the pious Lord Lyttelton, scandalised by the obscenity of the poem, begged that no more should be read, a universal cry of "Go on" had drowned the protest, and Sandwich was allowed to continue his recitation to the end. No sooner had the minister sat down than the honest, hot-headed Warburton flung himself into the debate, bubbling over with passion at the remembrance of the innumerable insults he had received from Wilkes and his friends. "The hardiest inhabitants of hell," roared he, "would blush to hear such blasphemies," and he begged Satan's pardon for comparing him to the member for Aylesbury.<sup>1</sup>

The House of Lords had far less difficulty in expressing its opinion of the Wilkes literature than the House of Commons, two peers only, Sandys and Temple, offering any defence for the accused man. A resolution was passed that "the printed paper entitled 'An Essay on Woman' . . . was a most scandalous, obscene, and impious libel, a gross profanation of many parts of the Holy Scriptures, and a most wicked and blasphemous attempt to ridicule and vilify the person of our most blessed Saviour." Witnesses

<sup>1</sup> *A Selection from the Unpublished Papers of W. Warburton*, F. Kilvert, pp. 225-32, 281-3; *Journals of House of Lords*, xxx. 415-17; *Parliamentary History*, xv. 1346-54; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 245-9; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 387-8, 394.

were called in and examined, the two disloyal printers, Michael Curry and Samuel Jennings being the most important; and although Lord Temple offered a vigorous protest against the methods used by the Government to get possession of the poem, the House was about to declare that Wilkes was its author when Lord Mansfield suggested that before being found guilty the criminal ought to be heard in his defence. Accordingly, the further consideration of the matter was adjourned until the following Thursday.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the tidings of Wilkes's new misfortune had spread over the town, and though some of his pious friends were shocked by his profanity, almost everyone condemned the ministers for their meanness in bribing a servant to steal the papers of his master. "Why do they not search the Bishop of Gloucester's study for heresy?" exclaimed Pitt, indignantly, and popular opinion, on the whole, considered the Government was as tyrannical as the Spanish Inquisition. Wilkes, nevertheless, was greatly perturbed when he heard what had happened in the House of Lords. If convicted of blasphemy he was liable to dreadful penalties, in addition to which he might lose the support of his most loyal followers, the rich and powerful Nonconformist classes. Obviously, it was the intention of the Government to hold up his character to public odium. When he walked home from the House in the early hours of the chill November morning a spirit of recklessness had come over him, and for the moment it seemed to him that all was lost.<sup>2</sup>

Rising as usual at an early hour, he scribbled a note to Mr. Martin,\* acknowledging that he was the author of the lampoon in *The North Briton*, a note that could be answered by a gentleman only in one way. The reply was sharp and swift. The member for Camelford was resolved upon a duel, having been practising sedulously at a target for

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Lords*, xxx. 415-17.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the Late Minority*, p. 234; *Papers of William Warburton*, F. Kilvert, pp. 228, 229.

several months in anticipation of the encounter. Springing into a hackney-coach with a brace of pistols he drove at once to No. 13 Great George Street, where he left a note to inform his enemy that he would await him at the Ring in Hyde Park. Wilkes happened to be out, calling upon friends, but within an hour he had followed the challenger to the appointed rendezvous, accompanied by the indispensable Humphrey Cotes.

It was twelve o'clock when the two politicians stood face to face ready for the fray. Fourteen yards of rain-sodden turf separated them, and the gloom of a winter morning hung over the park. The first shots were ineffective, Wilkes's pistol flashing in its pan, while Martin missed his aim. Standing back to back with new weapons they wheeled round and fired again, this time with tragic result, for as the smoke cleared off Wilkes was seen lying on the grass, writhing with pain. A bullet had struck him in the centre of the body, but turned away by the buttons of his coat and waistcoat it had passed along his side. Believing that he had received a mortal injury the wounded duellist, with the unselfishness of a chivalrous gentleman, called out to his antagonist to make his escape instantly. Unmindful, however, of his own danger Martin insisted upon going in search of a chair, refusing to think of flight until Wilkes had been carried off to his own home.<sup>1</sup>

It was found that his wound, though a severe one, was not dangerous, no vital organ being injured, the button having turned the bullet into the groin. While it was being probed for by the surgeon, a painful operation since it had sunk so deep that it had to be extracted from the back, Wilkes bore his sufferings with fortitude, repeating many times that the cause of his injury must be kept a secret, for Martin had behaved like a man of honour and

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1763), p. 563; *Lady's Magazine* (1763), p. 679; *London Magazine* (1763), p. 618; *Annual Register* (1763), p. 110; *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 18; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 38.

must come to no harm. On the following morning, being in great agony, and thinking he might die, he sent back the letter of challenge, so that there should be no written evidence against his antagonist, but the next day he was much better, and able to write to his daughter to tell her that he hoped to be well enough to pay her a visit at Christmas.<sup>1</sup> For nearly a fortnight he often had a relapse, being indiscreet in his diet, with a crowd of friends always at his bedside, in a fever of excitement from morning until night.

There was certainly much to occupy his thoughts during his convalescence. On the 23rd of the month the House of Commons resumed the debate upon his delinquencies, when it was proposed on behalf of the Government that "privilege of Parliament does not extend to the case of writing and publishing seditious libels." That neither Lords nor Commoners could be punished for their crimes was an outrageous doctrine, but since the demand for reform came from a tyrannical ministry, the Opposition strove to defeat it with all their strength. Though tortured by gout, Pitt fought against the surrender as though it would sweep away the last vestige of liberty, believing that the most vital principle of the constitution was at stake, supporting himself on crutches as he spoke, his limbs swathed in flannel. Yet, while declaiming indirectly against the persecution of the member for Aylesbury, his speech made it clear that his friendship with the demagogue had come to an end.

"He is the blasphemer of his God and the libeller of his King," he exclaimed with a gesture of scorn, words that wounded Wilkes more sorely than any that were spoken against him all his life.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the debate the Government passed their

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,879, f. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xv. 1364; *Papers of William Warburton*, F. Kilvert, p. 232; *Life and Times of Ralph Allen*, R. E. M. Peach, p. 194; *Mems. of Lord Lyttelton*, R. Phillimore, p. 647. Pitt's speech was made on Nov. 24.



resolution by a large majority, though the strength of the Opposition was increased to 133 votes. The king was delighted and the country gave little sign of displeasure. Since then, indeed, the nation has shown no desire that individual members of the House of Commons shall enjoy abnormal privileges. One by one the old prerogatives have vanished. A member of Parliament no longer is allowed to libel his fellow-creatures with impunity, or to frank his letters at the public expense, or to run into debt without fear of being pursued by his creditors. Still, none of the evils prophesied by Pitt have come to pass, modern sentiment apparently supporting the belief that the power and prestige of a legislative assembly does not depend upon perquisites and immunities.<sup>1</sup>

Though worsted in the House of Commons Wilkes soon won another victory in the law courts. On the 6th of December his action for trespass against Robert Wood, the Under-Secretary of State, was heard before Lord Chief Justice Pratt in the Court of Common Pleas, the minister being condemned to pay £1000 damages for carrying out the instructions of the general warrant. As before, the invincible Sergeant Glynn appeared for the plaintiff, but the judge himself was almost as vehement an advocate on the same side, for having, like Pitt, the dread of despotism always before his eyes, he declaimed against the warrant as though the isolated blunder of Government officials had been a systematic attack upon the constitution. The verdict was hailed as a great triumph by the popular party. A vast crowd had gathered in Westminster Hall and the result of the trial was received with shouts of joy. In a few moments the news had reached the sick-bed in Great George Street. An excited mob came rushing to the famous house with cries of "Wilkes and Liberty," and the

<sup>1</sup> On the question of Privilege, vide *Memoirs of the Duke of Grafton*, Sir Wm. Anson, p. 26 n.; *Lives of the Chancellors*, Lord Campbell, v. 248; *History of England*, W. E. Lecky, iii. 80; *Constitutional History of England*, Erskine May, ii. 2-5.

din of French horns, staying for more than an hour, serenading their hero and cheering for Pratt, then rushing off to hoot and groan at Lord Halifax and George Grenville.<sup>1</sup>

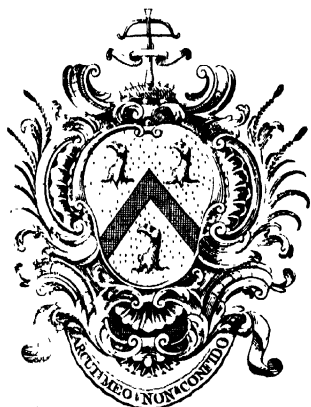
Undoubtedly the clamour against general warrants was a mere party cry, and the question in itself had little constitutional significance. At other times a mere technical informality in the arrest of a demagogue would have caused no alarm, but the contest between the king and the oligarchy gave it an importance that it did not deserve. Being a grave tactical blunder the opponents of the royal prerogative naturally turned it to the best account in their struggle to maintain the supremacy of Parliament. Nevertheless, it is not improbable that Pitt and Newcastle would have used the same methods as Halifax and Egremont in order to suppress a scurrilous pamphleteer. The arrest of Wilkes was carried out in a clumsy, arbitrary, and vindictive manner, but though some legal formalities may have been outraged the liberty of the subject was never in the slightest danger. Obviously, the judicial system was placed upon too firm a basis for any miscarriage of justice to ensue, and Wilkes and the printers soon obtained their compensation from the Court of Common Pleas. To-day the matter appears of even less importance than in 1763, since a police constable enjoys the same power of arbitrary arrest as was then exercised by a Secretary of State.

The employment of the general warrant and the prosecution of Wilkes involve two distinct questions, the first being merely a casual incident, the second a Government persecution in which tyranny grew more outrageous each time it received a check. In later days, when the law of libel became more elastic, the pages of *The North Briton*, quite exclusive of "No. 45," would have brought its editor a speedy and effective punishment; and in spite of the provocation of the Bute régime some of the most zealous Whigs

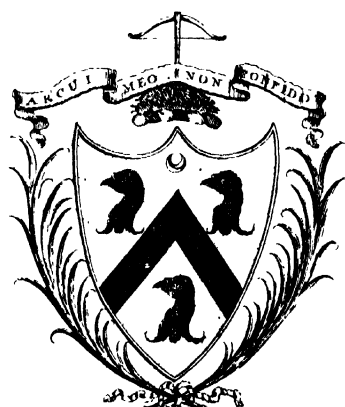
<sup>1</sup> *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1153-68; *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 8; *Court Magazine* (1763), p. 597; *Annual Register* (1763), p. 145.

would have rejoiced if Wilkes had been condemned by a legal tribunal to pay a severe penalty for his numerous slanders. Luckily for him his persecutors floundered from one mistake into another, till he had secured the great advantage of popular sympathy, and the wholesale lam-pooner had become a political martyr—the figurehead in the great struggle between two political parties over the principles of the Revolution. Still, although one may be unable to admire the tone of *The North Briton* or lament that its author was arrested, it must be conceded that he bore himself in a stout manly fashion from first to last; and while the issue of a general warrant may not appear as dastardly an action as formerly, it must be acknowledged that there was no more disgraceful example of ministerial tyranny during the eighteenth century than the special legislation and unfair espionage that were employed subsequently by the Grenville administration to crush John Wilkes.

On the same day that he obtained his verdict against Robert Wood another exciting incident disturbed the tranquillity of the patriot's sick-bed. About twelve o'clock at night a Scottish officer of the Marines, named Alexander Dun, came hammering at the door, uttering threatenings and slaughter, the servants driving him away at last with much difficulty. Next morning Wilkes received a note from Darby of the print-shop telling him to be on his guard, since his midnight visitor had been heard to vow that he would murder him at the first opportunity. A warrant was sought for and obtained, and when Lieutenant Dun paid another visit to 13 Great George Street two days later he was seized by some friends of the demagogue who were there for the purpose. An open penknife was found in his coat pocket, and as the man was obviously insane he was taken into custody. On the following day the House of Commons investigated the matter, and decided unanimously that the would-be assassin was a lunatic, much to the disappoint-



*John Wilkes Esq<sup>r</sup>*



*John Wilkes, F. R. S.*

THREE BOOKPLATES OF JOHN WILKES

The largest is designed and engraved by Darcy. Wilkes' books were sold by S. Baker the founder of Sotheby's, May 3rd, 1701, and by Leigh and Sotheby, June 1799 and November 1802



ment of all ardent Wilkites, who had hoped to discover that Dun was an emissary of the Government, hired to assassinate their hero. Soon afterwards the unfortunate sailor was lodged in the King's Bench prison, where he made many attempts to escape, and on one occasion set fire to his apartment. Eventually he was removed by his friends to a private mad-house, but in the course of time he was considered sane enough to receive his liberty, giving evidence of his sanity soon afterwards by a ferocious attack upon a post-boy. Nine years later he wrote a friendly letter to Wilkes, begging him to subscribe to one of his literary productions, but with this exception he never troubled the patriot again.<sup>1</sup>

Although Wilkes made a rapid recovery he was in no haste to obey the order of the House of Commons to attend "in his place." The king and his ministers had a new grievance against him, for when the public hangman had attempted to burn "No. 45" in front of the Royal Exchange on the 3rd of December, a mob of infuriated Wilkites had overwhelmed the constables and rescued the obnoxious paper from the flames.<sup>2</sup> Consequently the Government was in no humour to grant him much consideration, and, suspecting that he was a malingerer, they ordered Dr. Heberden and Mr. Cæsar Hawkins to visit Great George Street and "to observe the progress of his case." Being attended by his friend, Richard Brocklesby, one of the most eminent physicians of the day, Wilkes had no need of any further medical advice, but he was delighted at the opportunity of casting ridicule upon the House of Commons. In a friendly note to Mr. Heberden he expressed his regret

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 12, 1762, Jan. 24, Feb. 10, 24, 1764, June 5, 1767; *St. James's Chronicle*, Dec. 8-10, 10-13, 20-22, 1763, Feb. 16-18, 18-21, 1764; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1763), p. 615 (1764), p. 94; *Lady's Magazine* (1764), p. 94, (1767), p. 1217; *London Magazine* (1763), p. 674, (1764), pp. 107, 267; Add. MSS. 30,867, ff. 230-41, 30,871, f. 145; *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers* (1767), pp. 74-94.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xv. 1379-86; *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 5 and 6, 1763.

that he was unable to receive him professionally, but invited him to come "to eat a bit of mutton" with him in a few days; and he announced mockingly that, since his doctors had advised him to keep quiet and avoid company, he "was not able even to see his own wife." Immediately afterwards he called in Messrs. Duncan and Middleton, two of the king's surgeons, declaring that as the House thought it proper that he should be watched he considered two Scotsmen "most proper for his spies."<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact Wilkes was almost convalescent, though certainly not strong enough to defend himself in Parliament. The wound in his groin, seven inches long, had scarcely healed, an operation having been necessary since the bullet was extracted. A few days' rest, however, would have completed his recovery. But he had promised to visit his daughter before the end of December, and, hearing that she was unwell, he was prepared to run any risk rather than break his word.<sup>2</sup> Knowing that the Government would not allow him to leave the country, he made his plans with the utmost caution, prevaricating to the doctors and hiding his intentions from his solicitor. Though Carrington and his myrmidons were still watching his house he managed also to baffle their vigilance. Pretending that he was going to spend a few days with Humphrey Cotes at Byfleet, he left Great George Street at eight o'clock in the morning on the 24th of December in a chaise and four with his servant, Matthew Brown, and, although suffering great pain from the jolting of the carriage, he reached Dover the same night. On the following afternoon he crossed over to Calais, having a swift but stormy passage, lasting about two and a half hours,<sup>3</sup> and three days later he arrived in Paris.

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1763), pp. 616-17; *Annual Register* (1763), pp. 146-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 28, 1763; Add. MSS. 30,867, f. 249; 30,886, f. 3; *Walpole's Letters* (Toynbee), v. 435.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, ff. 245, 248; 22,131, f. 234; *Grenville Papers*, ii. 185.

The news of this hegira caused the greatest hubbub in the town, his enemies protesting exultantly that he was a craven, his friends lamenting because they believed that it was his worst policy to run away. Yet even Wilkes himself had not made up his mind whether he would remain abroad or return to face his foes. In leaving London he had acted mainly from impulse, leaving his fate for the present in the lap of the gods. Naturally, his first motive was to see his daughter once more, for there was a danger that he might be separated from her by a long imprisonment. During the next three weeks he was prepared to watch the progress of events, Paris being a safe and convenient place of observation. Although his combative instinct made him anxious to return, he realised that in the event of his expulsion from the House his creditors might prove more dangerous enemies than the ministers. On the other hand, with the assistance of Lord Temple, he might manage to keep solvent, while it was not improbable that he could defeat the Government once more in the law courts. Thus both friends and foes were wrong in their judgment of his motives. As often happened in his career, he was merely marking time, trusting to luck to guide his destinies.



## CHAPTER X

### AN EXILE IN PARIS

1764

**E**XCEPT for two brief clandestine visits to London in a vain endeavour to seek a pardon, Wilkes remained an exile from England during the next four years. For this long banishment he had no reason to blame his advisers. Immediately his friends knew that he had crossed the Channel he was overwhelmed with entreaties to return. Those best able to advise him, like George Onslow and William Fitzherbert, the two most zealous partisans amongst his fellow-members of Parliament, sent word that the House of Commons could do no more than expel him, while Earl Temple assured him that he had nothing to fear from the House of Lords. It was the opinion, also, of Alexander Philipps, his lawyer, that no British jury would convict him. But his friends warned him that if he remained abroad he would lose his popularity, since the public could not be expected to fight the battles of a man who had run away.<sup>1</sup>

Influenced by this unanimous advice, in which Humphrey Cotes and his brother Heaton had joined most earnestly, he determined to set out for London on the 13th of January, so as to arrive in time for the meeting of Parliament on the 16th of the month.<sup>2</sup> It was a grave risk, as he knew well enough, for should the House decide upon his expulsion it might be difficult for him to avoid a debtor's prison. The wonderful good fortune that attended him at some of the

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 1-27 ; 30,885, ff. 100, 104.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 249.

most perilous moments in his career did not fail him at this crisis. A genuine but an opportune relapse seized him. Ever since his flight from London he had been much indisposed. The jolting of the coach and the sickness he had suffered on the stormy sea had re-opened his wound, and though still weak and in much pain he had plunged into the gaities of Paris with accustomed ardour. Consequently he grew worse, and two days before he should have left for England he was obliged to take to his bed. It was a most fortunate indisposition. Had he returned to London on the 13th of January he would have suffered a long imprisonment, during which the fickle public must have lost all interest in "Wilkes and Liberty." On the other hand, his exile, although in most respects a delightful holiday, gave him the prestige of martyrdom, and he was able to arrive in his native land at a time of his own choosing, when he could make a dramatic re-appearance upon the political stage.

Since even his wonderful intuition could not foresee all these eventualities, Wilkes was greatly chagrined that he was unable to keep his promise to his friends, having made all arrangements to return to London on the day he had named.<sup>1</sup> Being still resolved to plead his cause in the House of Commons as soon as he was well enough to undertake the journey, he wrote a letter to the Speaker explaining that illness prevented him from obeying the order to attend in his place on the 19th of January, enclosing a certificate from two French physicians to show that he was speaking the truth.<sup>2</sup>

The Government, prompted by the king, would consent to no more procrastination. Knowing that the absence of the patriot had made their task an easier one, they were eager to avenge themselves while fortune was on their side. When the House of Commons resumed its discussion of the

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, f. 249; 30,868, ff. 6, 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxix. 721; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 41; cf. *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 25, 1764; Add. MS. 30,868, f. 23.

Wilkes affair the court party would allow no further clemency to be given to their enemy. His letter was treated with contempt; the evidence of the surgeons was deemed inadmissible, not being authenticated by a public notary. In every way the ministers tried to cast ridicule upon the story of his illness, hoping to make the country believe that he did not return because he was afraid. Many of his former advocates were weary of fighting his battles, thinking that he deserved punishment and that the surrender of privilege in the case of seditious libels, though demanded by an autocratic Government, was a reasonable innovation after all. Some of the most influential of the Whigs had come to the conclusion that there were better methods of checking the despotism of the king than by using John Wilkes as a stalking horse.

Still, though public enthusiasm had abated and the man was not present to defend himself, a band of stalwarts, headed by Sir George Savile and Sir William Meredith, fought valiantly to prevent him from expulsion. At first they were able to lead 102 followers into the division lobby, but as the hopelessness of the struggle became apparent the numbers dwindled rapidly away, until at two o'clock in the morning they were reduced to 57. It was in vain that the Opposition strove to postpone the debate. The Government were able to defeat every motion for adjournment. After the final division, however, the end was soon reached, and at half-past three o'clock on Friday, the 20th of January, it was resolved, "with scarce a negative," that "John Wilkes be, for his said offence, expelled the House."<sup>1</sup> At the next sitting a new writ was ordered for the election of a member for the borough of Aylesbury, which submitted to the parliamentary edict with patient humility, for five days later, one Anthony Bacon, a Virginia merchant of

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxix. 721-3; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 278; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 435-6; *Parliamentary History*, xv. 1388-93; *Chatham Correspondence*, ii. 273.

Copthall Court, was returned without opposition.<sup>1</sup> If Buckinghamshire tradesmen had not forgotten the traditions of Hampden, at all events they were tired of a lord of the manor who would not pay his bills.

Although the demagogue had vanished from the scene the storm that he had raised still reverberated through the halls of Westminster. After his expulsion, when the contest ceased to have any personal relation to the Sovereign, the Opposition made one last attempt to try a fall with the ministry. The punishment of Wilkes had relieved the Whigs from a serious embarrassment, for it was now possible to discuss general principles without reference to a "blasphemer of his God and a libeller of his King." All of the minority, except his personal friends, felt as though a heavy burden had been lifted from their shoulders. Accordingly they commenced a fresh attack upon the Government with renewed confidence, choosing the subject of general warrants as the grand issue, taking up the point of view that as the ministerial menials had been guilty of one despotic action they would continue the practice of arbitrary arrest for all time in spite of their unhappy experiences! It was a wise choice, since the wholesale apprehension of the printers had caused widespread uneasiness, and hundreds of loyal citizens, who cared nothing for Wilkes or his *North Briton*, were beginning to fear that the liberty of the subject was in danger.

It was one o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, the 15th of February, when Sir William Meredith, an advocate of every lost cause, opened the great debate in the House of Commons, his motion stating, with clumsy tautology, "that a General Warrant . . . is not warranted by law." Three hours later, when the first division was taken, the ministers found to their dismay that they had gained the victory by ten votes only, the Opposition having increased their numbers to the formidable total of 197. On the

<sup>1</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, Jan. 26-8; *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 27, 1764.

following Friday, also, when the discussion was renewed the court party fared little better, although a special whip had collected all their forces. Most of the great orators had speeches to deliver on the burning question, and it was not until half-past five o'clock in the morning that the House divided, the Government beating their opponents by the narrow majority of fourteen on a motion to adjourn the debate for four months.<sup>1</sup>

Besides their constitutional importance there were other circumstances that made these scenes memorable. On both occasions the sitting was one of the longest on record—the former lasting for sixteen, the latter for fourteen hours—and on the Wednesday morning the House did not rise until after seven o'clock. Never before in living memory had a Government been obliged to mobilise its invalids—gouty old gentlemen wrapped in blankets, victims of rheumatism and influenza muffled in shawls being carried from their beds into the wintry night to save their leaders from destruction. "The floor of the House," said Horace Walpole, "looked like the pool of Bethesda." It was on the last evening of the great struggle that the truculent Sir Fletcher Norton reminded his fellow-members, with more truth than politeness, that "a resolution of the House of Commons ought not to influence a judge any more than that of a drunken porter." The debate was remarkable also because three former members of the court party, namely Charles Yorke, General Conway, and Lord George Sackville, definitely threw off their allegiance and made hostile speeches against their former colleagues. Most memorable of all was the brilliant oration of Charles Townsend, who delivered a fine panegyric upon the principles of the Revolution, and, following the example of Pitt in the

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxix. 842-6; *Parliamentary History*, xv. 1398-1403; *History of England*, J. Adolphus, i. 139-41; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 287-302; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vi. 2-14; *Chatham Correspondence*, ii. 287-9; *History of the Late Minority*, pp. 268-80.

debate upon privilege, spoke of Wilkes as though he was beneath contempt, and repudiated him utterly in the name of Whiggism.

When the nation received its great object-lesson in royal despotism it was unfortunate for the Whigs that the first victim of the young king should be a violent extremist of dissolute habits, most prodigal and untrustworthy in all things relating to money, who refused to be bound by party ties or accommodate himself to party discipline. Owing to the character of the man and the indiscretion of much of his conduct it was impossible for most of those who should have been his political allies to sympathise with him in his misfortunes, while it was more difficult for them still to become the earnest champions of his cause. Nevertheless, Wilkes had some reason to complain of ingratitude. At the time when the Whig party was almost annihilated by the strategy of Bute, he had undertaken a single-handed contest against the powerful minister, and though his methods may have been rough and indiscreet, he had succeeded in convincing the nation that the principles of the Revolution were in jeopardy. Of all the members of the Opposition he was the only one to arouse any enthusiasm in the country. Moreover, when the authorities turned upon him in their wrath he had amazed the whole of Europe by the skill with which he baffled his persecutors, damaging the Government irreparably in the eyes of the electorate, and even making it the laughing stock of the Continent. Since he had done the greatest service to his party it was natural that he should expect to be supported with loyalty and enthusiasm, the defence of his liberty and the prevention of his expulsion being made the chief object of the Whig leaders. On the contrary, however, his political associates took care to separate his personality from his cause, regarding the latter as the chief plank in their platform, but abandoning the individual to his fate.

The motives of the Opposition were obvious. Had they confined their censure of general warrants to the particular case of John Wilkes they would have weakened their position, since it was obvious that this method of arrest had been chosen to meet a special circumstance, and the same mistake in all probability would never occur again, but by making the question a universal proposition they were able to terrify the nation into the belief that an oriental despotism was at hand. It was impossible also for the party to oppose the expulsion of Wilkes, as resolutely as it supported the motion of Sir William Meredith, as at least one half of its members were determined to have no connection with the demagogue. His disrespect towards the king, his innumerable lampoons, his notorious love of gallantry, his obscene and blasphemous conversation, his spendthrift habits and condition of bankruptcy—all of which blemishes were ascribed to him and generally believed—had influenced many of the most prominent Whig politicians to shun his acquaintance. In parliamentary influence, too, he was of no account, his followers being the poor and voteless, incapable of changing the result of a single election. Since his flight to France his popularity with the mob was on the wane. Thus it came about that the Opposition, which had been saved from extinction by his efforts, were content to abandon him to his fate rather than make his salvation a party question, and the man who had kindled the fire was cast out into the cold. From his refuge in France he had good reason to curse the dirty game of politics. “

On the 21st of February, a month after he was driven from the House of Commons, the trial of John Wilkes took place in the Court of King's Bench before Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, who, unlike his colleague of the Common Pleas, cared little for Revolution principles and nothing at all for popular applause. On the previous day, when counsel for the Crown desired to amend the

information against the defendant by striking out the word "Purport" and substituting the word "Tenor," the judge allowed the change to be made, since it was perfectly legal and did not injure the accused man, although he foresaw no doubt that sooner or later the popular party would raise the indignant cry—"He has altered the Record!"<sup>1</sup> Next morning, shortly after nine o'clock, the two historic trials commenced, Wilkes being first arraigned on the charge of having reprinted and published *The North Briton*, No. 45, and, secondly, for having printed and published "An Essay on Woman." Partisans on each side appear to have made efforts to tamper with the juries, who, whatever may have been their sympathies, had no alternative, in the face of the evidence of Curry, Balfe, and Kearsley, but to return a verdict against the defendant on both charges. For although his advisers denied the *publication* of the indecent poem, they were compelled to agree that "the mere fact of *printing* was manifest," showing how craftily the wily Norton had drafted his information. Judgment was signed, but no sentence was passed, a writ being issued for the arrest of the convicted man.<sup>2</sup>

Wilkes had made up his mind to remain abroad. No sooner, indeed, had he realised that his expulsion was inevitable than his eagerness to return to England began to fade away. He believed that Lord Mansfield would pass a terrible sentence upon him, and he feared that his captivity would be prolonged in a debtor's prison. He knew that the Whigs would make little effort to save him, and he saw that his popularity with the mob was diminishing rapidly. Having continued too unwell to undertake the

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton* (W. Bingley, 1770), vol. ii., Part I, pp. 90-1; *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (1853), vi. 260; *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1076-7; *The Boston Chronicle*, Sept. 5, 1768; *History of the Late Minority*, pp. 265-6.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 22,132, ff. 120, 283; *Reports of Cases*, Sir J. Burrow, iv. 2527; Public Record Office, Crown Roll, King's Bench 248, Nos. 75-6; *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 22, 23, 1764.



journey until he was driven from the House, he lost also his chief opportunity of making a dramatic display. The events that followed his expulsion convinced him that it would be folly to cross the Channel before he had ascertained whether or not he was insolvent. As soon as it was known that he was no longer member for Aylesbury a swarm of creditors came flocking to Great George Street, and the landlord put in a distraint for rent. In order to save his disciple from immediate bankruptcy Lord Temple authorised Heaton Wilkes to print an advertisement in the newspapers, requesting all who had claims upon his brother to send in their accounts to him. When the sick and harassed demagogue learnt that, in addition to his other misfortunes, he had been condemned by two London juries it was natural that he should resolve to remain in Paris until his native country should be more favourably disposed towards him, watching and waiting for an opportunity of striking another blow in the cause of John Wilkes. In his pessimistic moments he even imagined that he had become "an exile for life."<sup>1</sup>

The adjustment of his finances, which was left to the discretion of Humphrey Cotes, proved a long and difficult task. Everything that could be realised had to be thrown into the melting-pot immediately. His books, his furniture, and as much of his plate as was not pledged already, were sold by auction to satisfy the claims of the most rapacious of his creditors. Sir Edward Astley took over the lease of No. 13 Great George Street, while Sir William Lee of Hartwell purchased the Prebendal House and the manor of Aylesbury for the sum of £4100, which was regarded as an excellent price. Various other properties in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire were bought eventually by a certain Mr. Kent. At first Cotes believed that an income of £500 could be saved from the wreck, but in giving an account of

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 24, 25, 27; 30,886, ff. 6-7; *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 19, Jan. 23; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 49-54, 57-64.

his stewardship later in the year he reduced this estimate by more than one half. The debts owing to Lord Temple, which were afterwards struck off the balance sheet, were an additional asset in Wilkes's favour, and he still possessed some small estates in East Anglia. Still, when all the creditors were paid it is evident that his fortune could not have exceeded the original calculation of his friend.<sup>1</sup>

The process of setting the house in order was made infinitely more complicated by the extravagance of Wilkes himself, who, revelling in the unaccustomed freedom from duns, launched out into all manner of profusion. Although discreet enough to leave Delacour's expensive Hôtel de Saxe in the Rue de Colombier early in February he continued to "keep a coach," and made no attempt to reduce the number of his servants. In his new lodgings at the house of one Mme. de Rolinde in the Rue St. Nicaise, he lived quietly with his beloved Polly until his health improved, but as soon as the wound had healed he plunged once more into dissipation and conviviality.<sup>2</sup> At the same time his daughter was learning every accomplishment from the most celebrated masters in Paris. When the faithful Humphrey protested against this improvidence, Wilkes always made earnest promises of economy, invariably drawing upon his friend for a large sum in the same letter. In this manner he had squandered over a thousand pounds before the beginning of August.<sup>3</sup>

Nor was Humphrey Cotes a suitable person to be entrusted with the management of his affairs. Though he preached economy he was almost as prodigal as Wilkes himself. For many years he had been a devoted follower of Lord Temple, living in an atmosphere of political intrigue, always

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Mar. 14, April 16, 26, July 20, 1764; Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 97, 105, 108, 117; *History of Buckinghamshire*, George Lipscombe, ii. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,868, ff. 34, 36; *Notes and Queries*, 5th series, xii. 462, "O."

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 39, 65, 69; Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 75, 101.

ready to interest himself in the business of his leader to the neglect of his own. Rosy, epicurean, and convivial, he had won the implicit confidence of a host of friends, and his sobriquet of "honest Humphrey" showed their estimate of his character, but the reputation was scarcely well deserved, for his carelessness in money matters was hurrying him fast into bankruptcy. Formerly wine merchant to the court, he had lost the royal favour owing to his extreme Whig principles. Notorious rebels such as d'Eon and Rousseau found in him a most hospitable patron, being welcome guests at his country house as long as they chose to remain.<sup>1</sup> Yet, apart from his ostentatious dabbling in politics, he was a simple, kindly soul who loved Wilkes with the devotion of a brother, regarding him with an intense admiration, ready to make any sacrifice of time or of money in order to serve him.

A contemporary anecdote shows the generosity of the man. One day he laid a wager of a bottle of wine with the impecunious Churchill that he would write two better lines than the poet had ever composed and that he himself would acknowledge it. The bet being accepted, the wine merchant scribbled the following letter to his banker:—"Pay to Mr. Charles Churchill or order the sum of £50, and place it to the account of Humphrey Cotes." Naturally the needy author agreed that he had never written two such powerful lines in his life.<sup>2</sup> A Latin quotation at the expense of this generous friend was made no doubt in the first place by Wilkes himself, causing much amusement at the time. While going to pay a visit to Cotes's mistress he remarked to an acquaintance: "Fungar vice cotis"—a pun no worse than most of its kind.<sup>3</sup> "Honest Humphrey," indeed, although a married man with several children, was a sad prodigal in various ways.

<sup>1</sup> *D'Eon de Beaumont*, O. Homberg and F. Jouselin, p. 125; *Memoirs of Rev. Dr. Trusler* (1806), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Quin's Jests*, S. Bladon (1766), pp. 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> *Kensingtoniana*, John Wilkes; Add. MS. 30,888, f. 55.

It was not long before Wilkes became reconciled to his position. Luckily for him Baron d'Holbach, his fellow-student at Leyden, was now living in Paris, rich, hospitable, and famous, whose salon was the resort of the greatest of his contemporaries. Having always had a great affection for his old friend, the warm-hearted little German welcomed him with open arms, full of sympathy for his misfortunes, full of admiration at his brave fight in the cause of liberty. At the *petits dîners*, for which d'Holbach was renowned—banquets worthy of Lucullus, where “the feast of reason and the flow of soul” was as exquisite as the cuisine—Wilkes was an honoured guest, courted and flattered by the brilliant coterie of wits and philosophers that gathered around the table of the baron. Here he made the acquaintance of Diderot, a volatile genius with hatchet face and thin wiry frame, who, chafing under the difficulties that lay in the way of his encyclopædia of universal knowledge, was ready to vie with the Englishman in denouncing the tyranny of Governments for interfering with the freedom of the press. Here also he met the gentle d'Alembert, who was Diderot's principal confrère in the wonderful new work, equally enthusiastic in the cause of liberty and intolerant of the existing régime. Another frequent guest at these famous dinners, named Claude Adrian Helvetius, became an intimate friend of the exiled patriot, and his wife and daughters proved agreeable companions for Mary Wilkes. Like most of those who visited the d'Holbach salons he had been brought up in the school of Voltaire, which taught no coherent system of political philosophy, but regarded warfare against government as its *métier*. A reformed rake and a *fermier général* he was now at leisure to devote himself to the study of ethics and jurisprudence, and, being a man of fine intellect, his “*De l'Esprit*” had made a great stir in the world of letters.

With all of these, d'Holbach, Helvetius, Diderot, and d'Alembert, and the rest, Wilkes found himself in complete

sympathy. Being free-thinkers and agnostics, they were in open revolt against the Catholic Church, whose dogmas and traditions and whose stupendous power over life and liberty the English demagogue hated as heartily as any of them. Despising the pretensions of the *noblesse*, they had taken up arms against caste and privilege, eager that merit should obtain its own reward as readily as high birth. Like many Frenchmen, they were enthusiastic admirers of the British constitution, dismayed by the contrast of the cruel despotism under which their own country lay prone. Although none of the d'Holbach coterie would have acknowledged that their philosophy was inspired by the precepts of Rousseau, and would have repudiated most of the ethics of the "Contrat Social," each in his separate way was upholding the rights of mankind against the tyranny of government as strenuously as the neurotic little Genevese, scattering broadcast the seeds of doubt and discontent that were to bring forth their frightful crop in due season. The salon of d'Holbach was the cradle of the French Revolution.

To these liberal-minded Parisians the persecuted John Wilkes was a hero and a martyr. Owing to his friendship with their Mæcenæ they had watched his career with interest ever since he had become famous, and his exposition of Whig principles always had been in complete harmony with their own political views. In his long and desperate contest with his Sovereign they were wise enough to perceive that absolutism, though for a time it might appear to triumph, had received a most deadly blow, and they revered him as one of the greatest of living Englishmen. Around the glittering table in the gorgeous *salle à manger* a dozen of the most brilliant tongues in France were hushed into silence whenever John Wilkes began to tell the story of his fight with his persecutors, and as they listened, while his voice grew hoarse with indignation and his harsh features glowed with enthusiasm, they could not fail to learn a lesson that must have sunk deep into the mind of every liberal Frenchman.

Overjoyed to think that one resolute soul could accomplish so much, they saw clearly that the people of England were beginning to clamour for greater freedom, and they were encouraged to hope that a similar love of liberty might be born in their own land. It was the spirit of Wilkes that first put faith into the hearts of the pioneers of the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

A young journalist named Jean Baptiste Suard, who edited the *Gazette de France*, was the exile's principal friend outside the d'Holbach coterie. Though his love of letters and his sympathy with literary men caused him sometimes to be suspected of being an encyclopædist, he was a Tory at heart and a *persona grata* with the French Government; but no one in France was more devoted to Wilkes, or regarded him with greater admiration in spite of their political differences. With his happy knack of enlisting a faithful vassal in his service the apostle of liberty soon converted the good-natured Suard into an amateur odd-jobman, like Dell and Humphrey Cotes before him, never scrupling to ask a favour or entrust a commission, knowing that his admirer would oblige him with the greatest delight.<sup>2</sup>

Yet he was a man of intense pride. When he was a hungry literary hack Madame Geoffrin scolded him for his haughtiness.

"Quand on n'a pas de chemises," she remarked, "il ne faut pas avoir de fierté."

"Au contraire," he retorted, "il faut en avoir afin d'avoir quelque chose."

In Madame Suard, who was the sister of the famous printer, Charles Pancoucke, Miss Wilkes also found a sincere friend.

<sup>1</sup> There are numerous letters from famous Frenchmen scattered through the Wilkes MSS. in the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires . . . de M. Suard*, M. Garat, ii. 90-3; *Nouvelle Biographie Générale*, xliv. 603-7; *Lettres Inédites de Mlle. de Lespinasse*, C. Henry, p. 64 n.; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1818), ii. 85; Wilkes MSS., *passim*.

Another of the patriot's most intimate associates was Louis François de Brancas, Comte de Lauraguais, a man after his own heart, of insatiable energy, generous, and rich, with liberal sympathies and a universal gallant. Soldier, mechanic, scientist, and dramatic author, he dabbled with enthusiasm in all the professions, everything by starts and nothing long. Passionately devoted to the theatre, he accomplished an admirable reform by prohibiting the spectators from sitting on the stage. A sincere believer in the efficacy of inoculation, he was sent to prison for criticising a decree of the French Parliament which seemed to disparage his favourite panacea. Intensely fond of sport, he rode in a horse-race in public against an Irish peer, one of the first among the old noblesse to appear as an amateur jockey. It was seldom that he concealed himself for long from the public gaze. Chief, however, among his claims for notoriety was his connection with Sophie Arnould, the actress, whose wit and depravity provided the town with a constant store of piquant tales. Although Lauraguais loved Englishmen and English manners, it was not this characteristic alone that attracted John Wilkes.<sup>1</sup> With the lively Pierre Goy, who had taken his part in the encounter with Captain Forbes, the exiled politician also maintained the old camaraderie, though he disapproved of his love of the cards and dice. Of one sin at least Wilkes was entirely innocent. At no time in his life was he a gamester.

Many months had passed away, and the name of the patriot was almost forgotten in England, before he made an attempt to "feed the papers with gall and vinegar

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance inédites du Comte de Caylus*, i. 360 n. ; *Correspondence littéraire de Grimm*, ii. 318, iii. 311, iv. 41, viii. 175 ; *Journal du Règne de Louis XV*, E. J. Barbier, iv. 467-8 ; *Sophie Arnould*, E. and J. de Goncourt, pp. 42-6, 52, 89-90, 152, 195 ; *Mems. secrets de Bachaumont*, *passim* ; *Public Advertiser*, June 26, 1771, Mar. 20, 1772, Aug. 12, 1776 ; *Morning Post*, Oct. 18, 1776 ; *Notes and Queries*, 1st series, ix. 538 ; Wilkes MSS., *passim*.

against the administration," a promise given to his friends long ago when he told them of his intention to remain in exile. The first philippic took the form of "A Letter," addressed "to the Worthy Electors of the Borough of Aylesbury," printed on the 22nd of October as a pamphlet in Paris, whence it was forwarded to London. A month later it found its way into most of the English newspapers and magazines, but the London mob had become as supine as the disloyal constituents, and the address aroused little enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> Like most of Wilkes's political essays, it was a terse and vigorous composition, a general apologia in answer to the charges made against him in connection with "No. 45" and the "Essay on Woman." Cleverly enumerating the various blunders of his enemies, he denied that *The North Briton* was "false, scandalous, or seditious," protesting that it contained no "personal disrespect to the King," and declaring that he had been persecuted by the Tories in revenge for his crusade against Lord Bute. With respect to the "ludicrous poem," as he termed it, he made no attempt to repudiate the authorship—to the great chagrin of the cautious Heaton—merely protesting that the parody was a harmless piece of buffoonery, written to amuse his friends, an explanation that was regarded as a confession that he was much more guilty than Potter.<sup>2</sup> Perceiving that the printing of the verses was just as heinous a crime to the religious mind as their composition, Wilkes no doubt thought it immaterial to extenuate his part in the division of labour. There can be little doubt that his was the principal share.

Meanwhile English law had done its worst by him. On the 5th of August a proclamation had been read by the sheriff of Middlesex at the great door of St. Margaret's

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of David Hume to W. Strahan*, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 112-13; *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers* (Paris, 1767), p. 63. Cf. Add. MS. 30,869, f. 111; *The North Briton* (W. Bingley), vol. i., Part I, p. xlix.



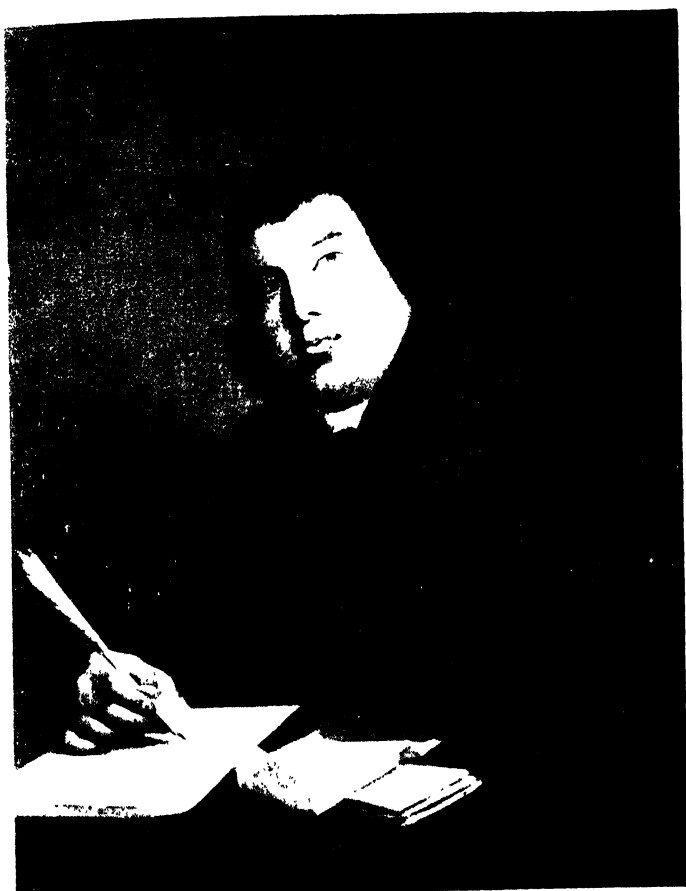
Church, Westminster, ordering him to appear at the Court of King's Bench, and on the 1st of November sentence of outlawry was pronounced against him, a *caput lupinum*, or wolf's head, being in legal fiction placed upon his shoulders in lieu of his own, a penalty of ostracism for all time.<sup>1</sup> This was a fortunate circumstance for Lord Halifax, against whom Wilkes had brought an action of damages for wrongful arrest, which the earl had been evading by every device of legal chicanery for several months. Now, in consequence of the plaintiff becoming an outlaw, the proceedings came to an end.<sup>2</sup>

On the day that Wilkes was stripped of his nationality he was staying at Boulogne with a congenial party. Cotes and Churchill had come from England to meet him, bringing "obliging messages" from Lord Temple with promises of financial support. The exile was now intent upon paradoxical plans of economy, contemplating a costly tour in Italy as an alternative to "expensive and luxurious Paris," and, inspired by one of his periodical fits of energy, had persuaded himself that he had perseverance enough to write a History of England in order to pay his debts.<sup>3</sup> The reunion of the three friends, which began with feasts and revelry, ended in tragedy. On the 29th of October, only five days after his arrival in the French town, Churchill became seriously unwell, and though the cynics attributed the cause to "a drunken debauch" and "a butt of claret," it was soon evident that his malady was typhus fever. Shattered by vice and intemperance, his constitution could not battle with the disease, and a week later he was dead. Remaining conscious to the last, he was able to dictate a will shortly before he died, in which he appointed Wilkes

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Aug. 10, 1764; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1764), p. 543; *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, vii. 254 n.; *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1099.

<sup>2</sup> *The North Briton*, W. Bingley (1770), vol. ii., Part I, p. 123; *History of England*, J. Adolphus, i. 136.

<sup>3</sup> *Grenville Papers*, ii. 454-6.



CHARLES CHURCHILL

*from a painting by Nathaniel Dance in Trinity Hospital.  
On the table is a letter addressed to "Wilkes, Esq., P."*



as his literary executor, requesting him to collect and publish a complete edition of his works.<sup>1</sup>

To the exiled demagogue the death of Charles Churchill was a bitter grief. Although incapable, perhaps, of a life-long friendship, since temperament and the stress of circumstances made him intolerant and self-absorbed, he was most sincere and loyal in all his attachments while they lasted. During the whole of their relationship the affection of the bright, volatile politician for the dull, heavy poet had never wavered for a moment. Long and pitifully he mourned for his late friend. "I cannot get any continued sleep," he wrote to Cotes, soon after the wine merchant had returned to England with the body of the dead man, "the idea of Churchill is ever before my eyes. A pleasing melancholy will perhaps succeed in time, and then I shall be fit for something. As I am there is not a more useless animal in the world. . . ." A little later he confessed, "I begin to recover from the late cruel blow, but I believe I shall never get quite over it. . . . I have not slept two hours . . .," he declared in a subsequent letter. "You know in what restless state a man's spirits must be who does not sleep. Churchill is still before my eyes."<sup>2</sup>

A month later another of Wilkes's friends had passed away, dying a pauper in the Fleet prison—a fellow school-fellow of Churchill and a poet too, Robert Lloyd by name, one of the reckless little band that had assisted in the campaign against the Government. The news of the tragedy at Boulogne may have hastened his end, for he worshipped his "dear Charles," to whose sister he was engaged. Although this second bereavement did not affect Wilkes so greatly as the first, he mourned over the loss of the merry

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 16, 1764; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vi. 145; *Works of T. Gray* (E. Gosse), iii. 187; *Courts of Europe*, H. Swinburne, i. 399; *Life of Cowper*, R. Southey, ii. 159; *Méms. secrets de Bachaumont*, ii. 140; *Sketches and Characters*, P. Thicknesse, p. 100; *Works of C. Churchill* (Aldine ed.).

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 144, 149, 160.

Welshman, and long afterwards he gave him an obituary notice, one of his neatest pen-pictures. "Mr. Lloyd was an excellent scholar and an easy natural poet. His peculiar excellence was the dressing up of an old thought in a new, neat, and trim manner. He was contented to scramble round the foot of Parnassus on his little Welsh pony, which seems never to have tired." <sup>1</sup>

Realising the necessity of leaving Paris, where he was already deep in debt, Wilkes agreed at last to follow the advice of his relatives and allow his daughter to return to England. Arrangements were made that she should stay with the complacent Heaton, who was living in the old house in St. John's Square, since her father, fearing lest her affections might be estranged, was anxious to prevent her from being placed in the custody of her mother.

"You may go a visiting your mamma whenever you choose it," he told the fourteen-year-old child, "all I say is never lie in the same house with her."

And Polly Wilkes, who adored her father and had not the slightest affection for her other parent, regarded the command as a perfectly natural one. The demagogue brought his daughter as far as Calais, avoiding Boulogne and its painful remembrances, and on the 5th of December the girl set sail for Dover with a faithful French maid named La Vallerie. Matthew Brown also accompanied her as far as London, returning immediately to his master with the news of her safe arrival. Wilkes waited at Calais until his servant had come back from England, and then hurried away to Paris, whence he set out on Christmas day upon his journey to Italy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Poetical Works of Robert Lloyd*, i. xv.; *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, J. Nichols, ii. 331; *The Political Register*, i. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 154, 155, 156; 30,879, f. 28; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. pp. 107, 111.

## CHAPTER XI

### THREE YEARS OF BANISHMENT

1764-1767

SINCE early autumn Wilkes had heard the south calling to him. A mistress with whom he was greatly fascinated had crossed the Alps several weeks earlier. It was on her account, to a large extent, that he was overwhelmed by a fresh burden of debt. For many months she had been living at his expense in "elegant lodgings furnished in the gayest style of the Parisians" in the Rue Neuve des Bons Enfants, overlooking the Palais Royal, with her mother and two servants. Jewellers, who were beginning to clamour for payment, had ministered to her rapacity. Like all her kind the love of dress was her grand passion. Naturally her chaperon also had taken full toll of the generous admirer.

The name of the lady was Gertrude Maria Corradini, a native of Bologna, where she was born on the 28th of June, 1745, in the parish of San Michele de Leprosettis.<sup>1</sup> In the year 1761, when a girl of sixteen, she had made her début as a dancer in the opera at Venice, but met with little success.<sup>2</sup> As the *chère amie*, however, of Mr. Udney, the British consul, she had gained some celebrity. Two years later, in consequence of the bankruptcy of the Englishman, which was due in a great measure to her extravagance, she came to Paris, where Wilkes met her at the house of a friend

<sup>1</sup> Communicated by Signor Emilio Orioli from the State Archives, Bologna.

<sup>2</sup> Communicated by Signor Aldo Ravà of Venice.

in the spring of 1764.<sup>1</sup> On his side it was a 'case of love at first sight, and he resolved to make her his mistress. Hitherto, inconstancy had been the mark of all his illicit attachments. With the exception of a favourite house-keeper, named Catherine Smith, who bore him a son shortly before the commencement of *The North Briton*, and a "beloved Mrs. Grosvenor," of whom he raved in his letters to Churchill, no woman had retained his fidelity for any length of period.

Now, at last, he found an inamorata who held him captive for more than a year. In his eyes the Italian courtesan was the most adorable creature that he had ever beheld. "She was of a perfect Grecian figure," so he described her at a later period, "cast in the mould of the Florentine Venus, excepting that she was rather taller. . . . Her whole form was of the most perfect symmetry." Long afterwards, when writing the story of this portion of his life, he was full of enthusiasm still for her "matchless charms" and "heavenly beauties."<sup>2</sup> With obvious coquetry she strove to excite his passion by feigning indifference, refusing all the first bribes that he wished to thrust upon her in order to gain the greater rewards that might be won by procrastination. Finally, having endeavoured to prove that there was nothing mercenary in her disposition, she took care also that the final surrender should be concealed by the cloak of piety. A silver crucifix that she greatly prized had been stolen during her journey to Paris. Hearing of the loss Wilkes hastened to purchase a similar one, which he presented to her on the next day. It was a favourable

<sup>1</sup> *Winckelmann*, Carl Justi, iii. 260.

<sup>2</sup> The original manuscript of this autobiography, in Wilkes's own handwriting, and entitled *The Life of John Wilkes*, is in the British Museum (Add. MS. 30.865). It has been privately printed under the title, *John Wilkes, Patriot. An Unfinished Autobiography* (Harrow, W. F. Taylor, 1888). Written in a style almost as naïve and outspoken as the *Confessions of Rousseau* or the *Mémoires of Casanova*, it is devoted for the most part to an account of his tour in Italy and his amour with the Corradini,

moment to convince him of her altruism. "She was so struck with this mark of attention," he wrote in his diary, "that the same afternoon she ceas'd to be cruel."

Unless Wilkes had been much enchanted the amour soon would have come to an end. For Corradini was all nerves, and to live with her was life in a storm. "Now and then a tempest of passion shook her fine frame, and for many hours left her languid and indeed almost lifeless." Some neurotic ailment constantly brought on a fit of sulks. Wilkes describes, also, how he was embarrassed by another phase in her temperament. "The force of jealousy sometimes carried her to the most ridiculous excess. He left her one evening ill in bed. Soon after he was gone she got up, dress'd herself, hir'd a hackney coach, and followed him to a French house, where her Italian servant had seen him enter. She continued in the coach near the door till morning, when Mr. Wilkes left the company and returned to his own house in the rue St. Nicaise. She then made many minute enquiries how he had pass'd the preceding evening. Knowing the jealousy of her nature, he chose only to give general and evasive answers. Upon this she broke into the most violent rage, then dissolv'd in tears and fell into convulsions for two or three hours."

At length the doctors declared that she must leave Paris before the cold weather began. Wilkes could not accompany her, having arranged to meet his friends at Boulogne, but he promised to join her in her native city as soon as possible. Being as infatuated as ever, in spite of her peevishness, he spared no expense in order that she should make the journey in comfort. "He gave her a travelling coach, sixty louis in specie, a draft on Lyons for a thousand livres, with silver enough to pay the posts through France. She had, besides, the permission of drawing on him as soon as she arrived at Bologna." It was not wonderful that his dearest friends mistrusted his promises of retrenchment.

Immediately his daughter had found a comfortable



home in England there was no reason why he should brave his creditors in Paris any longer. Travelling as fast as the bad roads would permit, but breaking his journey at Lyons for three days, he reached Turin in about a fortnight.<sup>1</sup> Illness had prevented the capricious Gertrude from keeping her promise to meet him in this city, so after a brief halt he set out once more. Ten days later he joined her in Bologna, where he remained for nearly two weeks, leaving again for the south, accompanied by his mistress, on the 28th of January, 1765. In a letter to his daughter he makes an odd confession—perhaps to disarm her suspicions in case she heard anything to his discredit. “I went to pay my compliments to Mlle. Corradini and dined every day at her house while I stayed at Bologna.”<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile little Polly Wilkes was meeting with many humiliations in England. Uncle Heaton, though the mildest of men with the greatest awe and reverence for his famous brother, had firm opinions on the subject of economy, and as soon as he cast eyes on the French maid—in his view a most outrageous extravagance—he told his niece that the woman must go away at once. So, in spite of the tears of the servant, who was devoted to her young mistress, and the protests of the girl, who declared that she could not dress herself, the unlucky La Vallerie, one of the worst of sailors, was sent back again across the Channel. Miss Wilkes, too, was much embarrassed by the attitude of her mother, who showed great irritation because her daughter had not been entrusted to her care. At their first interview she tried to persuade the child to live with her, and poor Polly, who would rather have died than disobey her father's orders, had to invent all manner of plausible excuses. Perceiving how matters stood Mrs. Wilkes took counsel with her attorney, and, learning that the law was on her side, she forcibly detained the girl when she paid her next

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 107-17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 128.



MARY (POLLY) WILKES

*From a miniature by Charles Humphrey in the Pierpont Morgan Collection  
Reproduced by permission of Dr. Williamson acting on behalf of the Trustees*



visit a few days later. There was a turbulent scene. Full of tears and with a brave show of the Wilkes spirit the indignant Polly protested that her father would never forgive her, while the mother, equally resolute, invoked the name of the Lord Chancellor. Finally, uncles and lawyers were called in and a compromise arranged, by which it was agreed that Miss Wilkes should spend half the week at St. John's Square and the other half at Red Lion Court.<sup>1</sup>

Although she missed her father, being "deprived," as she told him, "of the object of all her tenderness," the girl soon became reconciled to her new mode of life. Even the dingy house behind St. Sepulchre's Church ceased to have any terrors for her, its lethargic inmates striving to win her affection by every means in their power. Grandmother Meade and Mr. Sherbrooke overwhelmed her with presents, while the lazy Mrs. Wilkes proved the most indulgent of guardians. But it was in the old home in St. John's Square, where her "dearest papa" was born, that her happiest days were spent. Uncle Heaton was a kind, cheerful soul with a thrifty bourgeois wife, who wished to be on good terms with the stylish young niece. "Blue-eyed Nancy"—a pretty little cousin—was a delightful playmate. Crowds of friends and relatives hurried to pay their court to the daughter of the famous demagogue. Her uncle Israel, the eldest of the three brothers, a grave and stately gentleman, who was always waiting with patient dignity for the success that never came, often invited her to his home at Richmond, where there were three more young cousins to go boating with her on the river. Almost every week, too, a tempestuous grandmother Wilkes made an afternoon call, scolding and eulogising her distinguished son in the same breath, but a far more congenial companion all the same in her granddaughter's eyes than anyone else, because the girl knew that the peppery old lady loved and admired her

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,879, ff. 30-42.

"dearest papa" almost as much as she did herself. Young though she was, Polly was allowed to make her début at the Clerkenwell Assembly and appear at every kind of evening party. The people of St. John's Square were theatre-loving folk, and she was often taken to the play. If she had not been a girl with a sweet and gentle nature, considering the manner of her upbringing, it would have been impossible for her to have remained unspoilt.<sup>1</sup>

In his journey to the south Wilkes received much attention from all the fellow-countrymen whom he chanced to meet. At Milan two jovial Irishmen—Dillon and Needham—who, as gay Lotharios, were quite as famous as he, held high revels with him; while Mr. Thrale of Streatham and Lord Beauchamp, the son of the English ambassador at Paris, kept him company at Florence. In both of these cities his letters of introduction also were well received. "I have been caressed more than I can express during my whole journey," he wrote to his daughter on the 16th of February, "and by those in every country whose *éloge* does me real honour."<sup>2</sup> During his brief stay in the Eternal City, where he lodged in the Piazza di Spagna, he made the acquaintance of the celebrated Johann Winckelmann, the superintendent of the antiquities of Rome, and the pioneer of archæological research. The gentle savant was captivated by the wit and vivacity of the Englishman, and fell into raptures over the beauty of the Corradini, though somewhat dismayed by the extravagance of her tastes. On Wilkes's departure from Naples he presented him with an antique urn of porphery, upon which the patriot engraved an epitaph to Charles Churchill.<sup>3</sup>

Hitherto, Wilkes had found little else to admire in

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,879, ff. 42-65.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 132. Cf. "*Mann*" and *Manners*, Dr. Doran, ii. 131; *John Wilkes, an Unfinished Autobiography*, pp. 31-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Lettres Familières de Winckelmann*, i. 155, 243, 245; *Winckelmann's Letters to His Friends*, Feb. 22, 1765; *Political Register*, iii. 119; Add. MSS. 30,877, ff. 37, 45; *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 7, 1765.

Italy except the climate. For the food and the houses he had nothing but abuse, and the bad roads tried his temper sorely. Whatever enjoyment he might have found in the beautiful country was counteracted by the discomforts of the journey. But his most bitter antipathies were directed against the Italians. "The entrance into Rome," he admitted, "impresses an awe and veneration on a stranger. This impression, however," he continued, "soon goes off by the converse of the modern habitants."<sup>1</sup> Apparently he was never able to conquer his dislike. "I assure you," he told his daughter, "that I was never more disappointed than in the inhabitants of Italy. I expected to see a very clever and polite people; on the contrary, you cannot imagine anything more ignorant, more ill-bred, or more coarse than they are."<sup>2</sup>

The party reached its destination on the 26th of February. At first they stayed at Stephano's, "a large hotel near the sea, beyond the King's Palace"; then moved to the Villa Pietracatella, "about a mile from Naples, on a hill called Vomero."<sup>3</sup> The situation of the house was delightful. "The most poetical fancy cou'd scarcely form a view more truly pittoresque. In the front to the garden was a *masseria* (i.e. a vineyard, an orchard, and a corn-field all together), the town of Naples there under your eye, next the sea, and in the middle of the gulf the bold island of Capri." Here Wilkes expected to live in peace and contentment with his mistress and his books. Unhappily, the task of editing Churchill's poems proved uncongenial, and he found it impossible to proceed with his contemplated History of England without documents. Soon, too, the capricious Gertrude, who had brought a mother and an uncle in her

<sup>1</sup> John Wilkes, *an Unfinished Autobiography*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 168.

<sup>3</sup> John Wilkes, *an Unfinished Autobiography*, p. 48; *Mems. of the Colman Family*, R. B. Peake, i. 146; *Posthumous Letters to Francis and George Colman*, pp. 85-6. The house in which Wilkes stayed at Vomero has been identified by Mrs. Hutton of Naples. Unhappily it is entirely modernised.

train, began to quarrel incessantly with the faithful Matthew Brown.

In a little while interesting news of two old associates reached him. John Williams, the printer, who had helped to break into Balfe's workshop on the famous 30th of April, and whose name had appeared as the publisher on the title-page of the folio edition of *The North Briton*, had been tried and sentenced to stand in the pillory for his misdemeanours. The punishment, however, proved a magnificent triumph for the condemned man. During the whole time that the resolute journeyman was exposed to the populace in New Palace Yard he was cheered continuously by an enthusiastic mob, and upon his release his admirers presented him with a purse of a hundred guineas.<sup>1</sup> For the first time for many months the streets of London resounded with the cry of "Wilkes and Liberty."

Kearsley, too, the unfortunate printer of Ludgate Hill, whom Wilkes could never forgive for his betrayal, had been brought before the Court of King's Bench to receive sentence on the same day as his brother tradesman.<sup>2</sup> Utterly ruined in consequence of his connection with *The North Briton*, he had been obliged to fly to France during the previous year to avoid his debts, being driven home at last by sheer hunger, the "patriotic" party sternly refusing to give him any assistance. Like Williams, he too received his recompense, though in a different way. As a reward for confessing that Wilkes was the author of "No. 45" he was discharged from prison, and shortly afterwards succeeded in making a satisfactory settlement with his creditors, who allowed him to set up again in business in his old premises.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, July 4 and 26, 1764, Jan. 24, Feb. 13 and 15, 1765; *London Magazine* (1765), pp. 54, 108-9.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes's *Marginalia*, *History of the Late Minority* (3rd imp.), Brit. Mus., pp. 341-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1764), pp. 348, 544; (1765), p. 44; *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 26, Feb. 9, 1764; Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 110, 115, 125 *London Magazine* (1765), p. 109.

During the early spring Wilkes was much in the society of one of his most amusing old friends. James Boswell of Auchinleck, a young Scottish barrister, come abroad to please his father by learning law, and himself by studying humanity, happened to be staying in Naples. In the stormy days of "No. 45" the pertinacious little man, who craved for the acquaintance of every notoriety, had thrust himself occasionally into the demagogue's company, and he hastened to seize the new opportunity of repeating his former success, forgiving all the abuse that *The North Briton* had hurled at his country as readily as he tolerated the sarcasms of Dr. Johnson. Only the most churlish could fail to be entertained by the naïve egotism of the friendly young laird, who purred forth endless streams of self-revelation in kitten-like abandon, wholly unconscious of vanity, and Wilkes was delighted to humour him to the top of his bent. Yet one need not doubt that he was sincere when he told Boswell that he was "the most liberal man" that he had ever met, "a citizen of the world, free from the prejudices of any country." Occasionally he would chaff him about his lairdship, dubbing him "my old lord of Scotland," and declaring that he looked "as if he had a thousand men at his back." And the poor comic "citizen of the world," whose soul was always longing for sympathy, would plume himself vastly at the sound of this appreciation, his plump cheeks growing red with pride from his twinkling little eyes to his pointed chin. All through his life Wilkes kept a soft place in his heart for James Boswell.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of May there was a great upheaval in the *ménage* at Villa Pietracatella. It happened that the exile had gone to the island of Ischia on a visit to a friend, and for the first time Gertrude Corradini was left at Vomero to her own devices. With her mother and her uncle to encourage her the natural cupidity of the courtesan

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,877, f. 39. Cf. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. Birkbeck Hill, i. 395, ii. 11; *Letters of James Boswell* (1908), p. 30.



could not withstand the temptation. Packing every article of value upon which she could lay her hands, she fled from the house with her companions and hurried back to her native town as quickly as a coach and four would carry her. Fearing, no doubt, that her protector was at the end of his resources, she was anxious to realise all portable property without loss of time, confident that she would always be able to recall him to her side if it was ever worth her while. The lady, however, made a tactical blunder, besides overestimating her power. Wilkes's credit was not yet exhausted, and he refused to forgive the faithless mistress. His pride had received a grievous blow. All Italy was aware of his liaison with the beautiful opera dancer, and ridicule being the only thing in life that he feared he shrank from the jeers and laughter which he knew her infidelity would arouse. Weary of Vomero and longing to be in Paris, he seized the first opportunity of leaving for the north. "A wretched French Tartan, loaded with laths, was to sail from Naples to Marseilles." Wilkes set out in this vessel, accompanied by his friend, Major Ridley, on the 27th of June, and after a voyage of ten days he arrived at Toulon.<sup>1</sup>

Geneva was his next halting-place, and here he remained for a couple of months. His old friend, Lord Abingdon, with whom he had also spent a joyous time in Rome, was staying in the town, and the two paid an early visit to Voltaire. "I was charmed with the reception he gave me," Wilkes told his daughter in his next letter, "and still more with the fine sense and exquisite wit of his conversation. He put me to the blush by the many compliments he paid me. . . . I do not know when I have been so highly entertained." <sup>2</sup> In addition to the flattery of the sage of

<sup>1</sup> *John Wilkes, an Unfinished Autobiography*, pp. 50-6; *Lettres Familiales de Winckelmann*, i. 243; *Mémoires de Diderot*, iii. 314; "*Mann*" and *Manners*, ii. 134; *Public Advertiser*, July 16, 1765.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 184.

Ferney the outlaw was gratified also by most joyful news from England. George Grenville was no longer Premier, and a Whig ministry, under the leadership of Lord Rockingham, had come into office. Moreover, the new Secretary of State was the Duke of Grafton, one of the staunch little band who had paid a visit to Wilkes when he was a prisoner in the Tower. Naturally, the outlaw looked forward with confidence to some recompense, and, hastening back to Paris, he opened negotiations with the Government.

It was his ambition still, as it had been some years before, to secure an ambassadorship, and he endeavoured to persuade the new Premier not only to reverse his outlawry, but to send him also as British Minister to Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> The price, however, was greater than the Rockingham party cared to pay. Its leader had always been lukewarm in the cause of Wilkes, boasting that though "he loved him as a friend he did not fear him as an enemy," and he had no intention of jeopardising his position by asking the king to confer any favour upon the author of "No. 45." Still, it was essential to conciliate the sturdy demagogue. Owing to the high price of corn there was much poverty and distress throughout the land, and the people were seething with discontent. Already many dangerous riots had occurred in London. It was obvious to the ministers that if John Wilkes was to appear at this moment as a popular leader the Government would be greatly embarrassed. Hitherto the mob had been on the Whig side.

Wilkes was conscious of his strength, and, considering his services to the party, the claims that he made were neither rapacious nor prompted by motives of revenge. Honestly believing that he had been the victim of persecution, he appealed to the politicians in whose service he had suffered to clear him of the dreadful stigma of outlawry, and to compensate him for the losses which, with his habitual

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 204, 210, 214, 232; Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 198, 199; 30,869, f. 61.

ineptitude in finance; he imagined that he had sustained wholly in consequence of his warfare with the Government. Now that the Whigs were in power no one could reproach him with turning renegade because he accepted a place under the Crown. Nor could he be charged with having deserted the cause of Liberty. Since, at the very onset of his negotiations with the new minister, Lord Mansfield himself had confirmed Pratt's decision that general warrants were illegal, it must have appeared to him that the great reform for which he had fought and fallen was now attained.<sup>1</sup>

To his great chagrin Lord Rockingham gave him little hope that his expectations would be fulfilled, nevertheless taking care that he should be disillusioned by degrees. William Fitzherbert of Tessington, M.P. for Derby, acted as mediator between the exile and the ministry, for he was an old friend of Wilkes, being a fellow-member of the Beef Steak Club. "Shy, sly, and dry" was the pert Lady Vane's summary of his character in conversation with the author of "No. 45," but everyone else regarded him as a high-minded and benevolent gentleman.<sup>2</sup> Being the holder of a minor post, he was inclined to regard the matter from an official standpoint, though acting all the while in good faith towards Wilkes. It is certain that he did his best to persuade his chief to deal generously with his friend.

The offer of the Rockingham Whigs proved to be one of the most clever and crafty bribes that a ministry has ever employed to shut the mouth of a tiresome claimant. It was proposed to allow Wilkes an income of £1000 a year, to be paid out of the salaries of some of the principal members of the Government, and therefore terminable whenever they retired from office. At first the exile, who realised that the ministers wished to cut his claws so that he should be powerless to attack them, refused to accept the offer. "It did

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Mansfield*, John Holliday, pp. 141-2; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1765), p. 535; *London Magazine* (1765), p. 595.

<sup>2</sup> *Chatham Correspondence*, iii. 92; *Biog. Lit. and Political Anecdotes*, J. Almon, i. 6.

not captivate his imagination," and he regarded it as 'clandestine, eleemosinary, and precarious,' with the greatest emphasis on the last word. As he brooded over his grievances he began to utter dark threats against the new Government. "It depends, however, on them," he declared, "whether Mr. Wilkes is their friend or their enemy. If he starts as the latter he will lash them with scorpion rods . . . if we are not good friends on public grounds"—i.e. suitable provision for Mr. Wilkes—"I am their determined implacable enemy, ready to give the stab when it will wound the most."<sup>1</sup> One of his letters to George Onslow, a Rockingham wire-puller, sounded like an ultimatum: "I demand from the justice of my friends full pardon under the Great Seal for having successfully served my country."<sup>2</sup>

In spite of these brave words he was in a dilemma. Although he believed that he could overthrow the Government he knew that he would destroy himself at the same time. To return to England seemed to court ruin. The king, who was his implacable enemy, would exact the direst pains and penalties. A hundred creditors were waiting eagerly for his reappearance, and it was certain that he would be arrested if he were to show himself in public. His debts in Paris were increasing day by day, and the honest Humphrey had disappointed his expectation of fresh dividends from his estate. Swayed by these circumstances, and being assured by Fitzherbert that the annuity was "only a temporary provision," he consented at last to accept the Rockingham bribe after struggling with some nobility against the temptation for nearly three months.<sup>3</sup>

Among his friends there was some division of opinion with regard to the wisdom of this surrender. Naturally,

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,868, f. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,868, f. 209.

<sup>3</sup> These negotiations are fully described in Mr. Percy Fitzgerald's *Life of Wilkes*, i. 295-304; Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 201-20; 30,869, ff. 1-28; cf. *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), x. 129, xi. 447.

Onslow and Fitzherbert approved of his action, but Humphrey Cotes and Heaton Wilkes believed that he had made himself an exile for life. Equally censorious was the latest and most demonstrative of his acquaintances, a political parson named John Horne, a robust little dandy with only one eye—the brightest and keenest that ever shone in man's head—who was flaunting through the continent in very unclerical suits of flowered silk and gold lace, the son of a rich man under his care. On the 3rd of January, 1766, the clergyman wrote to Wilkes from Montpellier, sounding an appropriate note of warning. "I am afraid . . . that by furnishing you with the means of pleasure they intend to consign you over to dissipation."<sup>1</sup> Being a shrewd judge of men and affairs, Parson Horne was quite correct, for this was exactly what the Rockingham Whigs hoped to do, but since he was aware that no political party can afford to practise the virtue of gratitude he did not utter a word of rebuke against the selfishness of the ministers.

With his credit restored and a new supply of ready cash Wilkes was able to enjoy a life of gaiety once more. A misfortune, similar to that which had befallen him during his amours with the Corradini, happened to him in the spring. The beautiful Mlle. Chassagne, the ex-mistress of the Maître des Ballets at the Opera, who had been living with him at his new lodgings in the Rue des Saints Pères in the character of housekeeper, followed the example of the faithless Gertrude, and absconded with a large sum of money.<sup>2</sup> Contrary, however, to the expectation of those who wished him to remain in exile he did not become a slave to dissipation. Determined to return home at the first opportunity he prepared his plans with care and foresight, and filled the English newspapers with 'innumerable paragraphs of self-advertisement. Early in May he judged the

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Horne Took*, G. Stephens, i. 79; Add. MS. 30,869, f. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Rapports de Police de Marais*, Bibliothèque Nationale, No. 11,360; *European Magazine*, xxxiii, 164.

moment propitious. Quitting Paris in secret he landed at Dover on the 12th of the month, the delighted townsfolk, who recognised him instantly, welcoming him with a peal of bells, and on the next evening he had reached London, where he was provided with a hiding-place in Holles Street by his friend, Lauchlin Maclean.<sup>1</sup>

At first he was full of fight, having sufficient money to appease any tiresome creditor who might attempt to arrest him. Believing that he held the destinies of the Government in the hollow of his hand his demands became outrageous. A free pardon, a grant of £5000 and a pension of £1500 a year on the Irish establishment—these were the terms of peace that he submitted to the ministers. Lord Rockingham, a weak man as a rule, was strong on this occasion, believing that it was safer to make an enemy of Wilkes than an enemy of the king of England. From first to last he declined to receive him, sending Edmund Burke and Fitzherbert with evasive messages, and advising him to leave the country. After striving in vain for nearly three weeks to obtain a promise of help from the administration Wilkes at last grew tired of the struggle, and perceiving that he was certain to be brought up for sentence if he remained any longer in England, he left London abruptly on the 31st of May, taking his daughter back to Paris with him.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of October of the same year he made another attempt to procure a pardon. The Duke of Grafton was now Prime Minister, and Wilkes was led to believe that his former champion would be more amenable than Lord Rockingham. The moment seemed favourable, also, for there had been riots in many parts of the country owing to the high price of provisions. Landing at Dover on the 28th of

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, i. 367; *Public Advertiser*, May 14, 1766; Add. MS. 30,869, f. 33; *Papers of a Critic*, C. W. Dilke, ii. 38; *Life of Goldsmith*, J. Prior, i. 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Anecdotes of Lord Chatham*, ii. 10-16; *Life of Burke*, J. Prior, i. 152-3. Cf. Add. MS. 30,879, ff. 101-2; *Public Advertiser*, June 3, 1766.

October he proceeded to London, but found his former sanctuary closed against him, since Lauchlin Maclean, who had been appointed Under-Secretary of State to Lord Shelburne, did not care to receive so dangerous a guest. At first he lodged in Wigmore Street, and was then entertained by Wildman, proprietor of the Opposition Club in Albemarle Street, who was Parson Horne's brother-in-law. On the 1st of November, from the house of his host in Argyle buildings, he wrote a humble letter to the Duke of Grafton entreating him to intercede with the king on his behalf. More courageous than his predecessor, the Premier laid the message before George the Third, who treated it with silent contempt, and then, since Fitzherbert and other friends of Wilkes kept pressing for an answer, the Duke sent word to the outlaw that he must write to Pitt, who had recently been created the Earl of Chatham, and was, in everything but name, at the head of the Government.<sup>1</sup>

To Wilkes the reply of the Prime Minister was conclusive. From the Great Commoner it was impossible for him to ask any favour. Pitt and Temple were now bitter enemies, and Wilkes could not afford to run the risk of offending his patron. For "the Lord of Stowe," though somewhat tired of acting as banker to such an outrageous spendthrift and a little ashamed of the friendship of such an unmitigated rake, still wrote cordial letters, addressing him as "most celebrated exile," and was prepared to support him until his pardon was obtained. It was obvious also that the newly ennobled Lord Chatham was more ill-disposed towards him than before, regarding him no doubt, since his acceptance of the Rockingham pension, as an unprincipled adventurer, and with both Pitt and the king in league against him there was no hope that the indolent Grafton could do anything to help him. On the same evening that he received the Premier's message

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Duke of Grafton*, p. 193.

he ordered a post-chaise and set out on his return journey to France.<sup>1</sup>

Bitterly disappointed and ablaze with anger he lost no time in fulfilling his threat to lash the English minister with "scorpion rods." As soon as he arrived in the Rue des Saints Pères he began to compose a Letter to the Duke of Grafton—the second of his great philippics—which was finished on the 12th of December and soon afterwards published in pamphlet form both in London and Paris. Although nominally directed against the Premier it belaboured Lord Chatham far more lustily. Indeed no such harmful denunciation was ever directed against the great statesman. His character and career, both public and private, were submitted to the most merciless dissection, Wilkes taking pains to make it apparent how much he resented the desertion of one with whom he had once been on intimate terms, and he depicted his victim as a monster of selfishness and ingratitude.

"I believe," he declared, "that the flinty heart of Lord Chatham has known the sweets of private friendship . . . as little as even Lord Mansfield. They are formed to be admired, not beloved. . . . Friendship is too pure a pleasure for a mind cankered with ambition, or the lust of power and grandeur. Lord Chatham declared in Parliament the strongest attachment to Lord Temple . . . and said he would live and die with his noble brother. He has received obligations of the first magnitude from that noble brother: yet what trace of gratitude or friendship was ever found in any part of his conduct? . . . I have had as warm and express declarations of regard as could be made by this marble-hearted friend. . . . He may remember the compliments he paid me on two certain

<sup>1</sup> *Controversial Letters of J. Wilkes*, p. 60; *Grenville Papers*, iv. 1-4; *Chatham Correspondence*, iii. 242; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 4; *Memoirs of Duke of Grafton*, p. 193; *Memoirs of Margravine of Anspach*, ii. 190-3; *The Beautiful Lady Craven*, A. M. Broadley and Lewis Melville, ii. 152-3; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 178-83; *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 1-22, 1766.



poems in the year 1754. If I were to take the declarations made by himself and the late Mr. Potter *d la lettre* they were more charmed with those verses after the ninety-ninth time of reading than after the first. . . . I will now submit . . . whether there was not something particularly base and perfidious in Mr. Pitt's calling me 'a blasphemer of my God' for those very verses—and at a time when I was absent and dangerously ill from an affair of honour."

The "scorpion rods" of John Wilkes were as poisonous as those of Junius.<sup>1</sup>

The letter attracted some attention in pamphlet form, but made a far greater impression when it appeared in the *Public Advertiser* and was copied by all the magazines. Most of those who read the trenchant monograph agreed that it did good service to the exile's cause. Not only did it sparkle with satire against Pitt and Grafton, but it gave a most graphic description of Wilkes's arrest and imprisonment. For the first time the British public was able to read an account, from the pen of the victim himself, of the ridiculous blunders made by his persecutors. It amazed everyone to learn that Lord Halifax had evaded the lawsuit brought against him by the man he had illegally arrested when Robert Wood had been cast in heavy damages for the part he had taken. People began to talk and think of Wilkes once more, and many who had almost forgotten his name realised with self-reproach that the exiled demagogue was an injured man, treated with cruel neglect by his ungrateful countrymen. "Your letter to the Duke of Grafton has done you infinite service in the City and on the Exchange," wrote Heaton Wilkes to his brother on the 11th of May, 1767, "and it is deservedly spoken of as the best publication that has appeared with the name of J. W."<sup>2</sup>

About the same time another misfortune had fallen upon the exile, robbing him of half the joy of his latest

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 184-218.

<sup>2</sup> Add, MS. 30.860, f. 121.

triumph. "Honest Humphrey," who had administered his affairs under power of attorney, became a bankrupt in the spring of this year, and the sum of £1300 due to Wilkes was lost in the crash.<sup>1</sup> Poor Cotes had paid the price of his vanity and extravagance, having neglected his business persistently in order to make a figure in the political world, but no one believed that he had wilfully wronged his absent friend. The outlaw, too, never doubted the integrity of his agent for a moment, and in spite of the calamity the affection of the two men remained unimpaired.

The position of Wilkes was now desperate. The Rockingham pension had ceased, though he received occasional remittances from some of the ministers. Every acre of land that he was able to sell had been put up to auction. The income of his wife from the trust estates was greatly in arrear, and her solicitor demanded its payment.<sup>2</sup> During the period of his recent affluence he had exceeded his annuity. For many months he had borne once more the expense of supporting his daughter in Paris. A *petite maison* in the Faubourg St. Germain, where lived a wicked and pretty Mlle. Dufort, was principally maintained by him.<sup>3</sup> At one time or another almost all his friends or relatives had furnished him with loans. Both in France and in England he was overwhelmed with debt. None of his acquaintances except Lord Temple could now be relied upon to assist him. Although, with his usual optimism, he buoyed himself up with dreams of a "golden harvest" from his literary work and resolved to practise economy, he was practically at the end of his resources.<sup>4</sup>

Still, during his long exile fortune had been busy sowing the seeds that were now ripening for him into a "golden harvest." Since the conclusion of the Peace of Paris a general rise in prices had aroused a spirit of discontent

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,869, f. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,869, ff. 93, 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Les Rapports de Marais*, No. 11,359.

<sup>4</sup> *Grenville Papers*, iv. 15-18.

amongst the labouring population of Great Britain. During the same period the bad finance of successive budgets had exasperated the commercial community. The young king, who had been the idol of the people at the commencement of his reign, was growing more unpopular day by day. Having seen six ministers swept from office in less than half a dozen years the nation had lost all faith in the capacity of its statesmen. Even Pitt, now that he had taken a peerage and a pension, had ceased for the moment to be a power in the land. Thus it was that the British public, which loves to find a hero, was ready to welcome the first strong man who had the courage to appeal to its sympathies.

The time was propitious and the prophet was at hand. The personality of John Wilkes, now hallowed with the glory of martyrdom, was more magnetic than ever. Twice in recent years he had aroused the admiration of the people by his courage in venturing among his enemies undaunted by the frowns of his Sovereign. Twice also in a most excellent pamphlet he had stirred the imagination of the great middle-classes, convincing them how much he had done and how much he had suffered in the cause of liberty. Everyone of his sins was forgiven him. None save his creditors remembered his debts. No one seemed to care whether or not he was the author of the "Essay on Woman." All the maledictions of his foes had failed to convince his fellow-countrymen that he was a spendthrift, a cheat, and a debauchee. Thousands of prosperous English citizens remembered him only as the best friend of freedom that his own generation had known. Although the people of England were not prepared to call upon him to come as a liberator, it was apparent that they would not fail to rally round his standard if he were to raise it in their midst. In the course of five years the temper of the nation had entirely changed, and thus it happened that fate gave Wilkes his second great opportunity.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE MIDDLESEX ELECTION

1767-68

**A**LTHOUGH Wilkes foresaw that necessity was driving him back to England he would have returned home voluntarily in any case. With his usual political sagacity he had perceived how events were shaping themselves in his favour, and he was prepared to submit himself to whatever punishment his persecutors might dare to inflict. One thing only — a seat in Parliament — was needful for his salvation, necessary both as a permanent protection against his creditors and a means of conducting his mission to the people. Under the provisions of the Septennial Act a general election was due in the spring, and the demagogue began to look for a constituency that might be relied upon to elect him as its member.

In this respect there was much difference of opinion among his friends. With characteristic vanity his own inclinations favoured the City of London, and as early as July he was discussing the matter with Arthur Beardmore.<sup>1</sup> Most of his advisers laughed at the idea, but a month later, in spite of their ridicule, he allowed the *Public Advertiser* to print a paragraph, announcing on "good authority" that his candidature was certain.<sup>2</sup> It was suggested by Cotes that he should stand for Westminster, since John Churchill, the apothecary, a brother of the poet, had enormous influence with the electors, and was one of the

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,869, f. 148; cf. ff. 152, 159, 161.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Aug. 26, 1767.

most virulent of Wilkites. The faithful Heaton, with fraternal admiration, believed that "half of the counties or boroughs" might be invaded successfully.<sup>1</sup> Others suggested that Lord Temple should nominate the patriot for "some borough of his own." Unfortunately Wilkes and his patron were not at this moment on the best of terms. The earl had been annoyed by some references to himself in the Grafton philippic, and became still more incensed by the publication of the letter written to him by Wilkes five years previously, in which the Bagshot duel was so wittily described. For it nearly involved him in a battle too, Lord Talbot suspecting that he had sent the letter to the newspapers, but the culprit was the demagogue himself, who was vain of this particular composition, although with many evasions and no little mendacity he sought to shift the blame upon another.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, when it seemed necessary in the sacred cause of "Wilkes and Liberty," he did not scruple to tell a lie.

Fearing that he would be imprisoned for debt the exile hastened his departure from Paris, leaving with his daughter for Calais on the 22nd of November. Crossing the Channel on the 3rd of December, he hastened to London, but having consulted with his friends, he departed to Harwich in a few days. Sailing to the Hague on the 10th of the month, he determined to wait in Flanders until the eve of a dissolution of Parliament.<sup>3</sup> Finding that he was not safe, however, from his French creditors even here, he hurried on to Leyden and entered himself once more as a student of the university, thus securing immunity from arrest.<sup>4</sup> It was a severe winter, and during the two months that he waited

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,869, f. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Grenville Papers*, iv. 188, 262; Add. MSS. 30,869, ff. 139, 140, 164.

<sup>3</sup> *Controversial Letters*, p. 40; cf. Add. MS. 30,869, f. 173. Letters from Wilkes dated Dec. 3 and 10, 1767, in Wilkes's MSS. sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913.

<sup>4</sup> Add. MSS. 30,869, f. 177; 30,870, f. 6; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 222.

in Holland he was able to "scate almost every day," finding great delight in "so noble an exercise." Polly had remained in London on a visit to her mother, where she "seemed very happy," to the surprise of Uncle Heaton, who did not think she could be "with such wretches in the dismal dungeon of St. Sepulchre's." Early in the new year Wilkes set out from the Hague, and, after a short stay at Rotterdam, continued his journey to Ostend, whence he sailed for England, arriving in London at the beginning of February.<sup>1</sup> Here he took refuge with his termagant sister Mrs. Hayley, who lived in Great Alie Street, Goodman's Fields.

The newspapers had reported his arrival so often that the public was becoming incredulous and his presence caused no excitement. A little company of staunch friends—Fitzherbert among them—rallied around him with offers of assistance. By this time his mind was made up, and nothing would deter him from his purpose. At one of their first deliberations his advisers found him surrounded by manuscripts, paragraphs for the *Public Advertiser*, papers for Almon's *Political Register*, fresh attacks all of them against his ministerial enemies.<sup>2</sup> They told him it was not prudent to publish such things.

"No," retorted Wilkes cheerily, "but what the devil have I to do with prudence? I owe money in France, am an outlaw in England, hated by the King, the Parliament, and the bench of bishops. . . . I must raise a dust or starve in a gaol."

"Well, what means do you intend to pursue?"

"To set up for the City of London."

"Good God, Mr. Wilkes, where is your qualification?"

"General Warrants and the good nature of my fellow-citizens."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 6, 1768; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 237.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 238.

<sup>3</sup> *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 225.

Although his friends are said to have left him in despair, on this occasion he had no reason to complain of their generosity. The Freedom of the City was presented to him by the Joiners' Company, and a fund was raised to defray the expenses of the contest. Arrangement also was made to reserve "several public-houses on his account," for the supply of free drinks to the electors. A subscription list was opened to pacify his creditors.<sup>1</sup>

Hoping to avoid the errors of their predecessors by a policy entirely the reverse, Grafton and his colleagues thought it best to treat Wilkes with contempt, ignoring his presence in London, and making no attempt to molest him. None of the ministers believed that he had a chance of winning his election, since he had come so late into the field and was supported by few merchants of eminence. The king, too, seemed to have lost his thirst for vengeance, not even being moved to reprisals by a letter praying for pardon that Wilkes sent by his footman to the gate of Buckingham Palace.<sup>2</sup> So Wilkes was allowed to appear openly in the streets, and to advertise his candidature in the newspapers, without interference from the authorities. In his fear of glorifying the demagogue and exasperating the people Grafton seems to have erred as much in supineness and neglect as Grenville and Halifax had done in excess of zeal.<sup>3</sup>

Perceiving that the Government was afraid of him, Wilkes plunged into the contest with the greatest vigour. On the 11th of March his election address appeared, in which special emphasis was laid upon "the two important questions of public liberty, respecting General Warrants and Seizure of Papers." Four days later he was admitted to the Freedom of the City "by redemption" in the Company

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 14, 16, and 23, 1768; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 266.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 263-5; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 62-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of Duke of Grafton*, p. 194; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 126; *Letters of H. Walpole*, vii. 176.

of Joiners, and on the same evening a banquet was given in his honour by "a great number of the nobility and livery" at the King's Arms Tavern in Cornhill.<sup>1</sup> The newspapers were filled with puffs and paragraphs on his behalf, while his supporters conducted a minute canvass throughout the city every day. A caricature depicting him as Hercules cleaning the Augean stable had a great sale. So impressed was the public that his election was thought inevitable and large wagers were laid in his favour.<sup>2</sup>

The poll opened in the Guildhall on Wednesday the 16th of March. Six other candidates for the four seats accompanied Wilkes on to the hustings, and though two of them, William Beckford and Barlow Trecothick, were popular men, the excited mob that filled the great building had eyes and voices for "the patriot" alone. Amidst a tempest of cheers, but cool and alert in spite of the excitement of the moment, Wilkes made a brief speech, according to custom, telling the rapturous listeners that "this day makes me glorious amends for the rigour of a long, unmerited exile." At the usual "show of hands" the mass of grimy palms held up in his favour gave him a clear majority, but a poll was demanded for the other candidates, it being evident that few of his ragged friends were electors.<sup>3</sup> At a later date one of his followers was accused of voting twice over, turning his coat inside out on the second occasion as a disguise.

"Impossible," laughed Wilkes when they told him, "none of my people has a coat to his back."

The poll remained open for seven days, Wilkes appearing on the hustings every morning, being welcomed by the

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. xlv.; *Public Advertiser*, March 15 and 16, 1768.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of Sir P. Francis*, Parkes and Merivale, i. 204; *Works of T. Gray*, E. Gosse, iii. 317; *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, ii. 213; *George Selwyn and his Contemporaries* (1882), ii. 265; *Public Advertiser*, March 15, 1768.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Eminent Persons to David Hume*, pp. 87-8; *Public Advertiser*, March 17, 1768.



largest crowds that ever had assembled in the spacious hall. On several occasions his coach was dragged back by the mob to his headquarters at the King's Arms Tavern. Although his supporters made a brave show, going to vote in noisy batches, parading the city with horns and banners, and forming processions through the streets in decorated coaches, he was able to make few converts. Most of the "patriotic liverymen" had promised their votes to Beckford and Trecothick long before his candidature had been announced, while Lord Mayor Harley and Sir Robert Ladbroke received the support of "the court party." Between Wilkes and the former, who had officiated as sheriff years ago when the hangman made the unsuccessful attempt to burn *The North Briton*, there was a feud of long standing. Yet, though detested in consequence by the mob, Harley received nearly 4000 votes and stood at the head of the poll, while Wilkes, who remained at the bottom all through the week, obtained only 1247.<sup>1</sup>

Never anticipating a victory, Wilkes was not in the least disheartened. In a spirited oration from the hustings when the numbers were announced, he attributed his defeat to his late appearance in the field. "Ministerial influence, assisted by private malice," he thundered, "has been exerted in the most arbitrary and unconstitutional manner, and by means of the basest chicanery and oppression." To the delight of his audience he announced his intention of contesting the county of Middlesex, the election for which was to commence five days later. Outside the Guildhall an excited mob showed its approval of Johnny Wilkes's audacity by a like contempt for civic dignity. An attempt was made to storm the great door of the building, and for an hour or more a fierce fight was waged between the populace and the city constables.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. xlv.; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 125-8; *Public Advertiser*, March 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 24; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 266-8.

On the next morning his election address was issued "to the Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Middlesex." Two days previously he had taken the precaution of writing to Thomas Nuthall, the solicitor of the Treasury, promising to "present" himself to the court of King's Bench "in the beginning of the ensuing term." Supine as before the Government disdained to notice his presence, their motto being apparently, "Give him rope enough." There was no fear now that he would be troubled by creditors, a fund being opened at a principal bank in Lombard Street for the payment of his debts, subscriptions to which were invited by the newspapers.<sup>1</sup> It was announced that he owed his qualification to Lord Temple, who gave him a small freehold estate, resolute as ever to support "Wilkes and Liberty" at any cost, though the old friendship between the two had waned considerably.<sup>2</sup> In later years the patriot is said to have been inclined to disparage the generosity of his old friend, telling the following story of his parsimony. One of the earl's chaplains, who for many years had received no stipend, being at the point of death desired a shilling to be wrapped in paper, upon which he wrote: "If thou would be saved, go into Lord Temple's pocket."

The election of the two Knights of the Shire for the county of Middlesex took place on Monday the 28th of March. It had been arranged previously that the poll should be opened at ten o'clock and closed at six, with no previous holding up of hands. Besides Wilkes, the previous members, George Cooke and Sir William Proctor, were also candidates. All the arrangements of the popular party showed the most careful supervision. Never before had an

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 21, 23, and 24; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. xlvi.

<sup>2</sup> *The Unreformed House of Commons*, E. Porritt, i. 173; Add. MS. 32,989, f. 377; cf. *Public Advertiser*, March 18; *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, ii. 217; *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, 10th Report, Appendix, Part I, p. 412; *Memoirs of the House of Russell*, J. H. Wiffen, ii. 578.

election been so cleverly organised. Soon after six o'clock on the eventful morning a stream of hired coaches, decked with blue favours—nearly 250 in all—was making its way along the Acton road, conveying hundreds of excited Wilkites towards Brentford. Each carriage had been despatched in rotation from a particular public-house, the electors being informed previously by handbills and advertisements where to find them. Before setting out, blue cockades and "Wilkes and Liberty" cards had been distributed to every passenger, whose names and addresses were entered in a canvass book. No vehicle was permitted to go through St. James's Street, to avoid any personal demonstration against the king. Forty thousand notices had been issued on behalf of the popular candidate, urging his supporters to keep the peace. A complete record was kept of every doubtful voter. A small army of zealous helpers superintended the disposal of carriages and the distribution of handbills. A central committee sat continuously at the King's Arms Tavern or the Mile-end Assembly Rooms under the direct inspiration of Wilkes himself.<sup>1</sup> "Register, register, register" had become his motto, and beyond all doubt he was the first to realise the value of the election agent.

Quite appropriately he was the foremost in the arena, making his appearance on the hustings at Brentford Butts before eight o'clock, being conveyed thither from his lodgings at Prince's Court in a sumptuous coach drawn by six long-tailed horses. Fortunately for himself, Cooke was laid up with gout, but Sir William Proctor was able to appear with Wilkes in front of the polling-booth, where he remained during most of the day, braving the jeers, the hisses, and the execrations of the mob without flinching.<sup>2</sup> It must have

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 28, 30, and 31; cf. *Memoir of Thomas Hollis*, p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 30; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. xlvii.; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 128.

been on this occasion, if ever, that the demagogue perpetrated one of the most impudent of his jests.

"I wonder whether there are more fools or knaves down there," he remarked to his opponent, pointing contemptuously to the excited populace.

"I will tell them what you say," answered Sir William Proctor, "and put an end to you."

"It is yourself who would be put an end to," sneered Wilkes, "for I should tell them that it was a falsehood, and they would destroy you in the twinkling of an eye."<sup>1</sup>

Although the sheriffs declined to announce the result until the next morning, it was obvious when the books were closed that Wilkes was at the head of the poll. All day a mob of discontented weavers had blocked the roads and turnpikes leading to Brentford, in order to prevent their opponents from recording their votes, but on the whole they had obeyed the commands of their leaders to keep the peace. During the morning a sharp skirmish had taken place at Hyde Park Corner, the Wilkites having been incensed by two silk banners inscribed "No Blasphemer" and "No French Renegade," yet no other disturbance had occurred.<sup>2</sup> But as the mob on its return from Brentford poured through the west end of the town the enthusiasm of the victors could be held in check no longer. Each house they passed was compelled to illuminate its windows in honour of the day. Every carriage in the street was marked with "No. 45." All who would not shout for "Wilkes and Liberty" were beaten and insulted. One great crowd, rushing down the Strand, made a furious attempt to storm the Mansion House, burning to wreak vengeance upon the unpopular Harley. Another part of the mob invaded Berkeley Square and broke every pane of glass in Lord Bute's stately residence. At Charing Cross the Duke of

<sup>1</sup> *Statesmen of the Time of George the Third*, Henry Lord Brougham, 3rd series, p. 187; *Old and New London*, E. Walford, i. 411.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 177; *London Magazine*, xxxvii. 224; *Public Advertiser*, March 30 and 31, 1768.

Northumberland, to save his windows, was obliged to supply the populace with ale.<sup>1</sup>

Next morning when the poll was declared it was found that Wilkes had received 1292 votes; George Cooke, who was returned with him, obtaining only 827. To the working-classes this great victory seemed a triumph of their own. As yet there was no definite desire among them to obtain the suffrage, but since prices were rising higher and wages were falling lower it was inevitable that the hearts of the poor should grow more bitter against their rulers. Now, at last, after waiting for five years, their champion had fought and conquered in a fresh battle against the Government. Although they could have expected little benefit for themselves, it was sufficient to know that their oppressors had been worsted. And in addition to the fanaticism aroused by the spirit of discontent the sporting instinct of the people had been stirred by the splendid courage of the demagogue, and hundreds of well-paid artisans, who cared nothing for his principles, perceived that "Wilkes and Liberty" would afford them more amusement than cock-fighting.

On the second evening the tumult broke out afresh. Until three o'clock in the morning the metropolis was a blaze of light, a candle at least in each window being demanded by the mob. Upon every door in the town "No. 45" was scrawled in large figures. No vehicle was allowed to pass through the streets unless the driver wore the popular colours. The first nobility were compelled to decorate their coachmen and grooms with blue favours, and to cheer for "Wilkes and Liberty." The Austrian ambassador, most stately of diplomats, was dragged from his carriage and "No. 45" chalked upon the soles of his shoes. Through every street the boisterous crowds ebbed and flowed without ceasing, and the cry of "Show your lights" was sure to assail each householder whose candles were growing dim. Many a

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1768), p. 140; *London Magazine* (1768), p. 224; *Annual Register* (1768), p. 86.

sturdy Scotsman, however, sooner than do honour to the man who had reviled his race, preferred to have his windows broken. Sometimes the rioters followed up a fusillade of sticks and stones by attempting to break into the house of those who defied them ; and the beautiful Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton, was besieged by an angry multitude that strove in vain for nearly three hours to force a way inside. Often during the night fierce revolutionary cries echoed through the streets, shouts of " No King " and " No regal Government " drowning the chorus of " Wilkes and Liberty." Still the authorities made no adequate display of force, although for two days the town had been at the mercy of a drunken rabble.<sup>1</sup>

This was the last night of disturbance. For the most part the mob had been more tempestuous than vicious, and showed no desire to run riot after its first exhilaration had subsided. The results, too, were less serious than had been anticipated. Although many were terrified, few had received any hurt. Little damage, except broken windows, had been done to property. Although compelled to waste a month's supply of candles, most householders had been robbed of nothing else. The cost of paint to restore the front doors and coach panels that had been emblazoned with the popular hieroglyphics was the principal item in the bill of repairs. It was suggested with some truth that the glaziers, colourmen, and tallow-chandlers, who had reaped a splendid harvest, would remain loyal Wilkites to the end of their days. The better classes, nevertheless, bitterly resented their experience of mob rule, and the papers were filled with letters from indignant taxpayers. Wilkes himself used to tell a tale that showed the hatred with which the Tories regarded him at this time. One morning, while walking down the street behind an elderly dame, he saw her

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 1, 2, 5, and 6, 1768 ; *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, ii. 225-6 ; *Letters of Eminent Persons to David Hume*, pp. 88-9 ; *Works of Benjamin Franklin* (1887), iv. 149 ; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III.* H. Walpole, iii. 128-31 ; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 177-8.

look up at one of the numerous signboards that bore his portrait—for many a public-house was christened now “The Wilkes’s Head.”

“Aye,” she muttered to herself savagely, “he swings everywhere but where he ought.”<sup>1</sup>

A similar antipathy filled the heart of a pious and somewhat crazy old gentleman, named Alexander Cruden, who was in the habit of taking long walks with a sponge in his pocket, rubbing out the inscription “No. 45” whenever it met his eyes.<sup>2</sup> It must have been a tedious task, for one man alone claimed the honour of chalking “No. 45” on every door between Temple Bar and Hyde Park Corner.<sup>3</sup>

Exulting in his triumph Wilkes assumed the attitude of a dictator. To show that the mob was obedient to his will he bade his committee send out patrols to prevent further disorder. In his address to his constituents there was a veiled threat to the authorities that he might mobilise his rioters again in “the glorious cause of freedom.” Now that his power had been demonstrated he knew that his creditors would not dare to lay a hand upon him. Beyond all question he was the most popular man of the day, his countrymen regarding him with the like affection that they had once bestowed upon Pitt. They cared nothing for his debts, his blasphemy, nor his depravities, and laughed at the evil rumours that his enemies sought to spread abroad. Once two female Wilkites were talking of the cast in his eyes.

“Well, if he does squint,” said the more idolatrous of the pair, “it is no more than a gentleman ought to squint.”<sup>4</sup>

In the opinion of his followers he was without blemish.

To recover from the fatigue of the Middlesex election, and to flaunt himself before the world of fashion, Wilkes

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 112. A public-house in St. John’s Street, Clerkenwell, bore the sign of “Wilkes’s Head”—v. *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 21, 1769.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of A. Cruden* (1844), Wm. Youngman, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> *Hogarth’s Works*, J. Ireland and J. Nichols, ii. 222 n.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole*, viii. 141; *Town and Country Magazine*, i. 71.

hurried away to Bath as soon as he was able to leave London. Before his arrival the fashionable crowd was somewhat apprehensive, but it was soon found that the alarm was unnecessary. The patriot arrived without a mob at his heels, and behaved in every respect like a well-bred gentleman. During his brief visit society frowned upon him severely, and Lord Chancellor Camden, who as Lord Chief Justice Pratt had reunited Wilkes and Liberty when they were separated by the walls of the Tower, passed him without a nod of recognition, being a much sobered little statesman since he had the care of the Great Seal. Possessing the divine gift of patience in full measure, Wilkes was not in the least disconcerted by his frigid reception. Seldom losing his temper, however great the provocation, he could make full allowance, in the midst of his great triumph, for the present irritation of the fashionable world. One morning a blustering bully, accosting him in the Pump Room, began to chaff him in coarse, offensive personalities. Without deigning to speak a word, Wilkes listened passively, and then, stepping nearer to his defamer, he gazed at his neck for a moment with a look of expectation, "as if he searched for Jack Ketch's mark" behind his left ear. Most of the onlookers, deeming it not improbable that the fellow would come to be hanged, thought him well punished by the silent pleasantry.<sup>1</sup>

Returning to his modest lodgings at Prince's Court—where the erstwhile spendthrift was paying only two and a half guineas a week—Wilkes made his appearance before Lord Mansfield at the court of King's Bench on the 20th of April, the first day of Easter term, as he had promised. Having achieved his purpose, there was no reason for him to postpone his surrender. Although the mob came forth once more to welcome their hero, a force of soldiers, both horse

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence of David Garrick*, i. 298; *Memoirs of Sir Philip Francis*, Parkes and Merivale, i. 207; *Lives of the Chancellors*, John Lord Campbell, v. 275; *The Grenville Papers*, iv. 267.



and foot, guarded the approaches to Westminster Hall, so there was no disturbance. In a speech to the judge, which he read from his manuscript, he pleaded that there was not a word of disrespect towards the king in "No. 45," and that having privately printed only twelve copies of the "Essay on Woman" for his personal friends, he could not be deemed guilty of publishing the poem.

"Neither of the two verdicts could have been found against me," he continued, while his voice faltered as he met the serene gaze of the Lord Chief Justice, "if the records had not been materially altered without my consent."

After explaining that the alteration of the record was legitimate and had not prejudiced the case in any way, Lord Mansfield amazed his audience by declaring that he could not commit Wilkes to prison since he was not legally before the court, the Attorney General having neglected to bring him thither by a writ of *capias ut legatum*. The popular party was jubilant. Obviously, so everyone thought, this decision furnished another instance of the weakness of the authorities. No one doubted for a moment that the King's Bench and the king's ministers were each afraid of incurring popular odium, hence the amusing squabble over the acceptance of responsibility. To Wilkes the verdict meant a welcome lease of liberty, and although seven sheriff's officers were waiting for him outside the court with the requisite *capias*, ready at last, none of them dared to serve it upon him. Proceeding to a neighbouring coffee-house he showed himself from the window to the delighted multitude, spending a joyous evening afterwards at Vauxhall Gardens, as though he had not a care in the world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 33,053, f. 317; 32,989, ff. 363-7; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1768), p. 196; *Annual Register* (1768), p. 96; *Public Advertiser*, April 28; *Letters to and from Lord Malmesbury*, i. 155; *Letters of H. Walpole*, vii. 184-5; *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1077; *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, vi. 260, x. 45; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, pp. xlviii.-li.; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 134-5; *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 81.

After amusing himself for a week, while the Government pursued its new policy of ignoring him altogether, Wilkes took the opportunity of humiliating his opponents by sending a letter to the sheriff's officer, saying that he was waiting for him to come to Prince's Court to execute the *capias ut legatum*, and when the writ was served he set out immediately for Westminster Hall with Humphrey Cotes and his brother Heaton. It was his pose now to appear a law-abiding citizen, desirous of submitting to the justice of his country. Although the king had already begun to clamour for his expulsion from Parliament, the ministers naturally preferred to allow the law courts to decide his punishment, well content that the Lord Chief Justice should continue to earn his full share of unpopularity.<sup>1</sup> At Westminster a great crowd had assembled, and the lawyers were conciliatory. Without further delay the Attorney General signed his fiat for a writ of error, so that the prisoner could appeal against his outlawry, while Lord Mansfield, although compelled to refuse the bail that Sergeant Glynn demanded, went out of his way to utter the pious prayer: "God forbid that the defendant should not be allowed the benefit of every advantage he is entitled to by law." In the end Wilkes was committed to the custody of the marshal of the King's Bench, and set out in a hackney coach to the prison in St. George's Fields, Parson Horne being allowed to keep him company.<sup>2</sup>

It was about half-past six in the evening when he left Westminster Hall amidst the usual demonstration that attended his progress everywhere. From the first the mob began to close about his carriage, and before it had reached the bridge it was hemmed in by a thousand lusty artisans. Unharnessing the horses, they turned the coach round and dragged it up the Strand and along Fleet Street to the

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence of George III and Lord North*, i. 2; *Memoirs of Lord Rockingham*, ii. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1085-92; Add. MS. 32,989, f. 402; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. 1.

Three Tuns Tavern in Spitalfields, a famous Wilkite hostelry. Often during the journey Wilkes tried to make himself heard above the tumult, shouting hoarsely that he was the king's prisoner and must obey the law; while the mob, greatly tickled that Jack Wilkes should ask to go to gaol, drowned his voice with their cheers. As the carriage drew up before the tavern door the marshal and the tipstiffs were dragged from their seats and driven away amidst howls of derision. Taking advantage of this diversion Wilkes managed to force his way into the inn, and addressing the crowd again from a window on the second floor, he entreated them to disperse. In reply they shouted back that they would remain on watch all the night. Some undoubtedly kept their promise, but the demagogue easily baffled their vigilance. Changing his clothes he left the tavern secretly about ten o'clock, and driving off to St. George's Fields surrendered himself to his jailer. To the last fortune allowed him to make a laughing stock of the Government, for not only had he to beg for his arrest, but was obliged to steal into prison in disguise.<sup>1</sup> It was unlucky for the ministers that they should have made an enemy of one of the greatest humorists of his time.

Fearing that an attempt might be made to rescue the popular hero, the authorities had taken many precautions to guard the King's Bench Prison in case it should be attacked by the mob. In a special letter of warning Lord Weymouth, the Secretary of State, instructed the Surrey magistrates to suppress any disorder that might arise in the borough of Southwark with a firm hand, informing them where the various regiments of soldiers were quartered in case of need.<sup>2</sup> On the same day Viscount Barrington, Secretary for War, wrote to the Lord Lieutenant impressing upon him the necessity of keeping the peace.

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 28 and 29; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1768), p. 197; *London Magazine* (1768), p. 228; *Political Register*, iii. 268; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 273-6.

Strong measures were requisite during the first two weeks that followed the commitment of the demagogue. Disturbances broke out every day in some part of the town, and though no riot took place in the neighbourhood of the prison a noisy restless crowd began to ebb and flow without ceasing over St. George's Fields. On the evening after Wilkes had reached the gaol the inhabitants of the borough were compelled to illuminate their houses, and the multitude that surged through the streets of Southwark seemed to grow denser each night. In sore dismay the magistrates increased the guard of soldiers every morning.<sup>1</sup>

The inevitable collision took place on the 10th of May. It was rumoured that Wilkes would be present at the opening of Parliament, and some of his most ardent supporters being anxious to carry him in triumph to Westminster, a larger crowd than ever loitered in front of the prison. The windows of his apartment overlooked St. George's Fields, and occasionally his admirers were able to catch a glimpse of their idol. A hundred men of the 3rd Regiment of Foot Guards, drawn up within the rails outside the gaol, endeavoured to restrain the people as they pressed forward in eager curiosity to gaze upon the great man. Early in the afternoon a soldier and a patriot came to blows, the latter resenting the destruction of a seditious handbill. In a moment a fusillade of sticks and stones commenced, and the mob made a vicious onslaught upon the regiment. The magistrates acted with swift decision. The Riot Act was read, and, as the shower of missiles continued, the troops were ordered to fire upon their assailants. Two volleys rang forth, and as the smoke cleared away the mob was seen in full flight, leaving a dozen of their number wounded upon the ground. Beyond the outskirts of the crowd three harmless passers-by, two men

<sup>1</sup> *Life of William Lord Barrington*, pp. 113-14; *Public Advertiser*, April 30, May 2-7; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1768), pp. 197, 242; *Annual Register* (1768), pp. 99-100, 106-8.

and a woman, lay dead, killed by stray bullets. Still another casualty marked the tragic day. Some of the guardsmen, who had pursued one of the ringleaders into a small outhouse, shot a young farmer, named William Allen, in mistake for the fugitive.<sup>1</sup>

It was one of the unavoidable conflicts between order and disorder that burst forth occasionally when men's passions flame high. Soldiers are often brutal, and a magistrate is apt to be hasty when called upon to quell a savage mob. All England was deeply affected by the sad tragedy. Known as "The Massacre in St. George's Fields," it cast another black cloud of unpopularity over Grafton's moribund administration. At the coroner's inquest a verdict of wilful murder was returned against one of the guardsmen and a justice of the peace, and both eventually were brought to trial. It was believed that the Government had employed a Scottish regiment, hoping for a conflict between the soldiers and the people. A letter of thanks to the troops, written by Lord Barrington, found its way from the orderly book into the newspapers, and confirmed the popular impression that the authorities were bent upon shedding blood.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his contest with the Crown luck always appeared to be on the side of the agitator.

To Wilkes "the massacre" was another splendid advertisement. It seemed to emphasise the fact that he was fighting for freedom against tyranny and oppression. It encouraged the belief that the king and his ministers were the enemies of the people. Never before had the demagogue stood so high in the opinion of his countrymen.

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, May 11, 12, and 17, July 12, August 12, 1768; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1768), pp. 242, 244, 394; *Annual Register* (1768), pp. 61, 112, 113, 151; *London Magazine* (1768), p. 426; *Wine and Walnuts*, W. H. Pyne, i. 22; *Works of Benjamin Franklin* (1887), iv. 165-6; *Notes and Queries*, 1st series, ii. 273; *Political Register*, ii. 417; *Memoirs of William Hickey*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of William Lord Barrington*, pp. 117-18; *Letters of Junius* (1910), ii. 182; cf. *Notes and Queries*, 1st series, i. 125; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part II, 498.



GOLD BROOCH IN THE  
FORM OF 45  
*In the Collection*



JEFFS WAKE SNUFF BOX WITH  
PORTRAIT OF WILKES  
*In the Collection of Jean Lane*



PORTRAIT OF WILKES ON BATTERSEA  
ENAMEL BOX  
*In the British Museum*



CHINESE PORCELAIN PUNCH BOWL

On each side are a pair of medallions exactly similar, each forming a satirical coat of Arms. No. 1, bust of John Wilkes; crest, a lion passant; supporters, Sergeant Glynn and Lord Temple, motto, Always ready in a good cause—above is inscribed Wilkes and Liberty. No. 2, Bust of Lord Mansfield, with a hydra below; crest, a viper; supporters, Lord Bute and the Devil; motto, Justice sans pitié  
*In the British Museum*



By the refusal to accept his liberty at the hands of the mob he had converted hundreds of prosperous merchants who had regarded him hitherto as a wicked marplot. Lord Temple wrote praising his discretion, and promised to pay him a visit.<sup>1</sup> The pious Lord Lyttelton forgot his abhorrence of the "Essay on Woman" in his admiration of the patriot's "good behaviour."<sup>2</sup> With the rank and file his popularity amounted to adoration. In all sorts of peculiar shapes his picture met the eye everywhere. On a tavern signboard, on an engraved medallion in the case of a watch, on the lid of an enamelled snuff-box, on punch bowls, milk jugs, ale cans, on plates and dishes, in every kind of fantastic colour, his hideous portrait, with the familiar squint, might be seen grinning mockingly.<sup>3</sup> At this period indeed there were few persons in the British Isles who were unfamiliar with his features.

On the 8th of June he gained another triumph, the judges of the court of King's Bench deciding unanimously that his outlawry should be reversed. Since the massacre in St. George's Fields there had been several fresh disturbances, and as Lord Mansfield was much jostled by the crowd on his way to Westminster Hall, it was often hinted that his verdict had been influenced by fear.<sup>4</sup> In his speech, too, he gave the impression of timidity, going out of his way to declare that he was not affected by the threats that had been uttered against him.<sup>5</sup> It was a masterly oration all the same, an exhaustive criticism of an obscure branch of law, delivered in a calm melodious voice as the great Chief Justice leant back in his chair, while the words rippled from his lips in a stream of sparkling eloquence.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Grenville Papers*, iv. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 35,362, ff. 83-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Book for a Rainy Day*, J. T. Smith (1905), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Henry Grattan*, iii. 26-7; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 192.

<sup>5</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 151-2.

<sup>6</sup> *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, x. 45-6.



Still the most amazing part of the judgment was the ground upon which his lordship decided that the outlawry could not stand, the omission of the words "of the County of Middlesex" from a sheriff's writ having in his opinion rendered it null and void.<sup>1</sup> The decision was hailed with the greatest joy, bonfires and illuminations being alight in every town in England. Unable to appreciate the subtleties of law the people regarded the judgment as another proof of the efficacy of the late riots.

Ten days later Wilkes was brought into the court of King's Bench once more to receive sentence. The proceedings were brief, and the prisoner, being taken to Westminster with the greatest secrecy, was not recognised by the mob. The intrepid Glynn, who had been Wilkes's counsel all through the long struggle, made a last effort for his client, producing a sworn affidavit from George Kearsley to show that all the evidence had been obtained illegally under a general warrant.<sup>2</sup> It fell to Justice Yates, as senior judge, to pronounce sentence, a lucky circumstance for Lord Mansfield, who had earned his full share of abuse already through the "alteration of the record." For the republication of *The North Briton*, "No. 45," Wilkes was condemned to pay a fine of £500, and be imprisoned for ten months; and for printing and publishing "The Essay on Woman" a similar fine was imposed with twelve months' imprisonment. In vain he pleaded that his former punishment should be taken into consideration, but he was permitted to move for a Writ of Error, referring the case to the House of Lords.<sup>3</sup>

In contemporary opinion the dual sentence seemed both lenient and severe. It was thought to inflict a monstrous

<sup>1</sup> *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1109-17.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 164; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. lvi. Kearsley evidently was trying to regain the good opinion of Wilkes and his party.

<sup>3</sup> *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1124; *Reports of Cases*, Sir James Burrow, iv. 2527-78; Public Record Office, Crown Rolls, King's Bench, No. 248.



JOHN WILKES AND SIR ISAAC GLYNNE  
*From the picture by Zoffany in the possession of Col. Prud'homme Brune*



penalty for printing the poem, since the twelve copies evidently were intended for private circulation, and the prosecution did not try to prove that Wilkes was the author. The base methods employed to obtain the revise proofs were remembered with disgust. In comparison his punishment for republishing *The North Briton* was regarded as a moderate, if not a just one. Due warning had been given of the risk he was running in repeating the offence, and, in spite of verbal quibbles, he had accused his Sovereign of telling a lie. Considering the harsh penalties imposed upon political offenders it was impossible to contend that a sentence of ten months' imprisonment was an immoderate one for "the libeller of his King." Five years before, had there been no foolish blunder with a general warrant, he might have been sent to Newgate for the remainder of his life without exciting the least popular sympathy. Modern opinion, however, will probably regard the "Essay on Woman" as the graver offence. At all events, the criminal libels which it contained would render its author liable to a far heavier sentence in the present day.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SECOND PARLIAMENTARY WAR

1768-1769

EVER since the Middlesex election there had been rumours that Wilkes would be expelled from Parliament, but the Government observed the greatest secrecy with regard to its plans.<sup>1</sup> Although George the Third, exasperated by the persistency with which his enemy tried to extenuate "No. 45," had declared that "the expulsion of Mr. Wilkes appears to be very essential and must be effected," there was much difference of opinion among the ministers.<sup>2</sup> Most of the Cabinet were disposed to oblige the king, but Camden was wholly averse to such a drastic measure, deeming it more politic to let matters rest where they were.<sup>3</sup> Eventually the will of the great lawyer prevailed. Grafton, a political dilettante grown weary of his hobby, was glad to procrastinate, having no inclination to incite the Wilkites to begin window-smashing once more.

The Premier was bearing a heavy weight of unpopularity already. Accepting office originally because his adherence was necessary in order that Pitt might come into power, he had been robbed by illness of the services of his colleague for many months, besides sharing the odium which the Great Commoner had incurred through the acceptance of a peerage.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 35,362, f. 192; 32,990, f. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 32,990, f. 71; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 142-172; *Correspondence of George III and Lord North*, i. 2.; cf. *Chatham Correspondence*, iii. 324.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of Duke of Grafton*, pp. 199-202; *Lives of the Chancellors*, John, Lord Campbell, v. 274-5.

While the mob hated him because he had not obtained a pardon for Wilkes, the upper classes were indignant at his want of firmness during the riots. For the poverty and distress that had increased so much in recent years his Government was held responsible. With the American colonists, too, it was becoming more detested every day owing to the imposition of new import duties. In the Cabinet, since Chatham had ceased to preside over its councils, there was little unanimity. A heterogeneous medley of Whig and Tory, they were bound together merely by love of place, which, though possibly one of the strongest of political bonds, is apt to be productive of fierce jealousies. Naturally Grafton, who had never regarded Wilkes as a grievous sinner, was loath to increase his own embarrassments by trying to deprive the demagogue of his seat. So the summer passed by, and the Government took no steps to gratify the king. Instead, a sort of tacit compact seems to have been arranged, the ministers being content to allow Wilkes to remain a member of Parliament as long as he submitted to his punishment quietly.<sup>1</sup>

But he was not prepared to keep his agreement after the opening of the new session. With obstinate temerity he refused to acknowledge that he was beaten. It was only by audacity that he could hope to keep himself before the eyes of the public, and he was confident that he had everything to gain and nothing to lose by continuing his battle with the ministerial forces. His sentence had been pronounced and would not be increased. Thanks to the generosity of his friends, it was probable that he might leave prison free from debt. For the first time since he had become famous a rich and influential party in the city had rallied to his side. Having overthrown Bute, made a laughing stock of Grenville, and sown discord amongst the Rocking-

<sup>1</sup> *Biographical, Lit. and Political Anecdote*, J. Almon, i. 8; Add. MS. 35.608, f. 286; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 295. Cf. *Letters of Lord Chesterfield* (Mahon), iv. 508.

hams, it was natural that he should feel confident of avenging himself effectively upon Grafton. Moreover, he honestly believed that the rights of the people had been attacked in his person and that he was engaged in a noble struggle for freedom. Though not one of the most imaginative of men, it was impossible that he should pose successfully as the champion of Liberty for so long without being convinced of the truth of his mission.

A few days before the meeting of Parliament he opened the campaign with "An Address to the Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Middlesex"—a form of manifesto that he made use of incessantly—announcing his intention of presenting a petition to the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> It was significant that the rumours of his *rapprochement* with the Government ceased immediately, giving place to numerous reports that he would be expelled. Owing to the wonderful licence allowed to the inmates of the King's Bench prison he was permitted to write what he chose to the public press, and to have as many interviews with his friends as he desired.<sup>2</sup> Unmoved by the entreaties of his more cautious advisers, and unintimidated by ministerial menaces, he proceeded to compose the petition according to promise, recounting all his grievances against the authorities. He complained of his arrest under a general warrant, of his imprisonment in the Tower "though charged only with a misdemeanour," of the seizure of his papers, of the alteration of the record, of the bribing of his servant, Michael Curry, and he concluded by submitting "the whole of his Case to the Wisdom and Justice of the House in full Persuasion of having an effectual and speedy Redress of all his grievances."<sup>3</sup>

The petition was presented on the first day of the new session by Sir Joseph Mawbey, member for Southwark,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Political Register*, iii. 379.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 3 and 8, 1768; *Works of T. Gray* (E. Gosse), iii. 332.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii. 33.

pretentious blusterer, who was popularly known by the not inappropriate sobriquet of "Hog-stie," being the proprietor of a large distillery. By the device of carrying the war into the enemy's camp Wilkes hoped to arouse the spirit of the Opposition as he had done in former years, so that it might be prepared to fight his battle in Parliament if an attempt was made to expel him. Like most of his tactics the manœuvre did good service to his cause, setting a light to a flame that the court party could not extinguish till the whole fabric of the constitution seemed in peril. Henceforth, for many a long week, "the case of Mr. Wilkes," in some form or another, occupied the attention of the House of Commons.

In the debate on the petition the noisy Mawbey was supported with vigour by Beckford and Sawbridge, showing that the City of London would lend considerable aid to the popular cause, while William Dowdeswell, as an official Whig, also spoke on the same side.<sup>1</sup> During the next three weeks it became apparent that, whether the ministers wished it or no, the grievances of John Wilkes were going to cause them an infinite deal of trouble. Messages and conferences between the two Houses soon became necessary almost every day. The debate on the petition was succeeded by a discussion upon the delicate question of privilege. By clever strategy the demagogue managed to obtain permission to be heard at the Bar of the Lower House. With amazing cunning he requested the peers to allow Lord March and Lord Sandwich to be examined by the Commons, almost causing a quarrel between the two chambers.<sup>2</sup> It was an opening campaign of great dash and daring, wholly fulfilling his expectations as an advertisement and helping to inspire the disunited minority with new courage.

Following up the advantage he had gained he hastened

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 532-3; *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 46-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 533-5; *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii. 58, 65, 68, 72, 74, 79, 81-3, 89, 91, 94-5, 99, 112-13; *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 61-9, 73-5, 77, 82-3, 93-5, 106-15; *Letters of H* . . . .  
(Toynbee), vii. 241-6; *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, ii. 418-19.



to strike another deadly blow against the Government. By the help of his friends in Southwark he had procured a copy of the letter written in the previous April by Lord Weymouth, the Secretary of State, to Daniel Ponton, the Chairman of the Quarter Sessions at Lambeth, in which the magistrates were urged to take precautions to prevent the outbreak of a riot. Delighted at the chance of reviling the ministers he forwarded the document to the *St. James's Chronicle*, where it appeared on the 10th of December with a prefatory letter from the pen of Wilkes himself :

" I send you the following authentic state paper, the date of which, prior by more than three weeks to the fatal 10th of May, shows how long the horrid massacre in St. George's Fields had been planned and determined upon before it was carried into execution, and how long a hellish project can be brooded over by some infernal spirits without one moment's remorse." <sup>1</sup>

The letter was anonymous, but when the House of Lords summoned the printer of the newspaper before them to answer for his breach of privilege the ministers learnt that Wilkes was the real offender. Procedure required discretion, for the culprit was still a member of Parliament, and, though the Government would willingly have arraigned him without delay, they were obliged to resort to another conference between the two Houses, at which the representatives of the Commons were informed that " the Lords Spiritual and Temporal " had resolved that the letter in the *St. James's Chronicle* was " an insolent, scandalous, and seditious libel." In no wise dismayed, Wilkes published another " handbill " to the Middlesex freeholders on the next day, in which he declared that Lord Weymouth's letter was written " in characters of blood." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *St. James's Chronicle*, Dec. 8-10, 1768.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 193-7; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 246; *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii, Dec. 16; *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 106-111, 617; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part II, 498; vol. ii., Part I, 20-1.

During the same week the Government endured a fresh humiliation at his hands. Another election for the county of Middlesex had taken place owing to the death of poor gouty Cooke, and Wilkes's nominee had been chosen. The new knight of the shire was Sergeant Glynn, the famous barrister, a zealous partisan, though not one of Wilkes's most congenial companions, being scrupulous, circumspect, and valetudinarian, the antithesis of his client in every respect. Nor did the ill-luck of the Government end with their defeat at the poll. Since a riot was anticipated a regiment of foot-soldiers and a bodyguard of Irish chairmen armed with staves had been provided for the protection of the court candidate. Excited by the cheers of the Wilkites "the bludgeon-men," who had been spoiling for a fight all day, grew unruly early in the afternoon, and at last made a fierce onslaught on the crowd. In the battle that ensued many heads were broken on both sides, one of the popular party—a young lawyer named George Clarke—being killed outright by a blow from the staff of an Irish pacificator.<sup>1</sup>

It was an unlucky incident from a ministerial standpoint, but a most fortunate event for John Wilkes. The affray made as great a noise as "the massacre in St. George's Fields" and McQuirk, the homicidal chairman, became as horrible a *bête noire* in the eyes of the populace as the Scottish soldier who shot William Allen. Once more the patriots accused the Government of shedding the blood of its political opponents wilfully and with malice prepense, and its unpopularity in consequence was increased a thousand-fold. In contrast the prestige of Wilkes as a defender of the liberties of his countrymen rose higher still. Thousands of honest folk were encouraged to believe that he was their sole protector against a tyranny worse than that of the Stuarts.

On the second day of the new year Wilkes added to his offences against the Government by allowing himself to be

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 9, 1768; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1768), p. 587; *Annual Register* (1768), p. 193.

elected an Alderman of the Ward of Farringdon Without.<sup>1</sup> Although he was a prisoner there was nothing to disqualify him for the post. Nor were civic honours strictly confined to those who had business connection with the city. It was the custom for men of position, who desired commercial influence for political purposes, to obtain a seat upon the Common Council or Court of Aldermen. To serve as Lord Mayor, or even as Sheriff, was an honour coveted by many a wealthy man who had never lived nor traded in any of the London Wards. The election was held at a Wardmote at St. Bride's Church amidst the usual scenes of popular enthusiasm, but owing to the poll being closed prematurely by mistake it was declared illegal. Naturally, the decision was regarded as another instance of ministerial persecution, and at the next election, a few weeks later, Wilkes was rechosen unanimously.<sup>2</sup>

An event to which Wilkes had looked forward wistfully for several years took place about this time. On the 14th of the month old Mrs. Meade passed away in the dismal little court behind St. Sepulchre's Church, leaving, it was said, a fortune of £100,000. Probably the most remarkable incident in her dreary career from the cradle to the tomb was her funeral, which was "very grand," the corpse "being attended to the grave by 116 men carrying lights." Although the contents of her will cannot have caused her son-in-law much disappointment, for his dear Polly was left residuary legatee, it was certainly not flattering to his pride. It was specified that the life interest in the estate, bequeathed to Mrs. John Wilkes, was for her "sole use" and "free from the control of her husband," who was to have "no benefit." Even the family jewels were only to be "lent to her during *his* life" at the discretion of her executors. A significant paragraph soon found its way

<sup>1</sup> *Aldermen of the City of London*, A. B. Beaven, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 3, 4, 5, 20, 23, 25, 28, 1769; *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 84-5; *Political Register*, iv. 121; *Town and Country Magazine*, i. 52; *London Magazine*, xxxviii. 52, 109.

into *The Public Advertiser*. "It is asserted that a Reconciliation between a certain patriotic gentleman and his lady will shortly take place to the entire satisfaction of their respective families." The prophecy was not fulfilled, but the man who made it apparently was well acquainted with Wilkes's temperament.<sup>1</sup>

On Friday, the 27th of January, the same day that he was re-elected an Alderman, Wilkes was allowed to attend the House of Commons at the adjourned hearing of his petition, which had already caused so many discussions during the two previous months. The usual mob escorted him from Southwark to St. Stephen's, and the crowd that invaded the building was so great that an order had to be passed "that the lobby and the Speaker's chamber be cleared of all persons except Mr. Wilkes, the Marshal of the King's Bench prison and his officers, the counsel, witnesses, and agents attending the House." The proceedings lasted from noon until one o'clock on the following morning, during most of which time the agitator held a reception in the Sergeant's room, his friends flocking to congratulate him on being elected an Alderman. On behalf of the Government Lord North moved that "the counsel for Mr. Wilkes be not admitted to be heard upon any of the allegations contained in the said petition" except the alteration of the record and the bribing of Curry, the printer, and, to the delight of the king, the motion was carried by a majority of 147. When brought to the Bar Wilkes claimed his right to take the oath as a member of the House, but his request was refused on the ground that he was a prisoner.<sup>2</sup>

On the following Tuesday, at his next appearance before his fellow-Commoners, when the consideration of his petition was resumed, he made amends for his former lack of success

<sup>1</sup> *Musgrave's Obituary*, iv. 175; Will of Mary Mead. P. C. C. 55 Bogg; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1769), p. 55; *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 20, 1769.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii. 156; *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 538-40; *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 120-8; *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 30, 1769; *Correspondence of George III with Lord North*, i. 4.

by scoring an important point against his enemies. Having noticed that in one of the previous entries in the votes of the House the word blasphemy was used in describing the "Essay on Woman," he protested that no such word existed in the original record, and after a long debate the objectionable epithet was expunged. It was a triumph of some importance, since the reputation of having been condemned for blasphemy, which he now wiped away, had done much to alienate many Nonconformist consciences. As on the first day the discussion lasted for many hours, and it was not until two o'clock on Wednesday morning that Mr. Marshall Thomas was free to take back his prisoner to St. George's Fields.<sup>1</sup>

Much longer sittings wearied the House of Commons during the next few days. Inspired by King George the ministers had now resolved that Wilkes must be expelled from Parliament. With the exception of Lord Shelburne all the members of the Cabinet were agreed that his numerous offences justified the punishment. In the debates upon his petition the fighting spirit of the Opposition had revived, while the publication of Lord Weymouth's letter and the numerous manifestoes to the freeholders of Middlesex had almost incited the people to rebellion. In the opinion of the Government the best means of checking his power of mischief was to drive him from the House of Commons as Grenville had done, thus robbing him of the prestige and privilege of a member of Parliament.

Ever since Wilkes had returned to England the Grafton ministry had blundered from one mistake into another. If severity had been their intention they might have prevented him from displaying himself for weeks at the head of the mob by clapping him into prison as soon as he arrived in London. Had they resolved to adopt the wiser policy of clemency they could have torn away his crown of

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 212-13; *Hist. of England*, J. Adolphus, i. 345; Add. MS. 30,870, f. 105.

martyrdom by granting him a free pardon. In the former case, by losing the magnetism of his presence and the inspiration of his leadership, the popular cause would have been deprived of half the advantages that won its victory. In the latter case the wrongs and persecutions of a powerful demagogue would not have served as an incitement to riot and disorder. It was the height of folly, also, on the part of the Government to encourage a series of debates on the merits of Wilkes's petition, and to give the prisoner an opportunity of making so many triumphal processions to Westminster. In some respects the ministers had met with considerable ill-luck. It was unfortunate that the reversal of the outlawry, owing in a great measure to Lord Mansfield's verbosity, should be regarded as a concession to popular clamour. It was more unfortunate still that there should be two bloody encounters between the authorities and the mob, and that on each occasion it should appear to have been the former that had broken the law.

On Wednesday, the 1st of February, the two fragments of the petition which the House had consented to hear were both rejected without a division, it being resolved that Lord Mansfield's alteration of the record was "according to law and justice," and that "Mr. Wilkes has not made good his charge against Philip Carteret Webb" with respect to the bribing of his servant. Dr. William Blackstone, the learned jurist, who was member for Westbury in Wiltshire, delivered an elaborate speech in defence of the Lord Chief Justice's action, and poor Philip Webb, now old and blind, was present to hear once more the account of his sorry blunderings as solicitor for the Treasury when he had conducted the prosecution of Wilkes five years before.<sup>1</sup>

On the following morning Wilkes was brought again to the Bar of the House of Commons and informed by the Speaker that he was charged with being the author and

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 542-3; *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 131-8; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 214-16.

publisher of the Introduction to Lord Weymouth's letter which had appeared in *The St. James' Chronicle* on the 10th of May, 1768. It was the most dramatic moment in his eventful life. Everyone knew, and none better than himself, that the ministers had resolved to expel him. In both Houses there was a large majority eager to obey the wishes of their king. All his hopes rested upon the unstable basis of popular applause. If his forces were to melt away, as they had done after his former expulsion, either a debtor's prison or a continental exile would be his fate when his present sentence had expired. Yet he had weighed his chances and was prepared to take the risk. During the past few months his aspirations had assumed a wider range. It was no longer his ambition to gain the usual reward for making himself a political nuisance, a place of profit having ceased to be the object of his desires. Since he had established his influence in the City of London, which all through the ages had been on the winning side, there was no need that he should set any limit to his appetite. "I see no reason," remarked one of his intelligent contemporaries, "why he may not be Sheriff and Lord Mayor in regular succession, and why not Prime Minister before he dies."<sup>1</sup> So, confident in his own strength, and regarding himself as the sole champion of liberty, he faced his enemies with undaunted courage, honestly believing that he was striking the most splendid blow for freedom since the time of the Great Charter.

A crowded House awaited his defence. He faced his audience boldly, but with due respect, and his voice could be heard distinctly by everyone.

"I was the person who sent Lord Weymouth's letter to the printer," he declared, scornfully, "and I do glory in confessing myself the author and publisher of the prefatory remarks. I thought it my duty to bring to light that *bloody scroll*. I ask pardon, sir," he continued, with a

<sup>1</sup> *The Francis Letters*, i. 103; *Memoirs of Sir P. Francis, Parkes and Merivale*, i. 223.

bow to the Speaker, "that I made use of too mild and gentle expressions when I mentioned so wicked, so inhuman, and so cowardly a massacre as that in St. George's Fields."

Determined to omit no pretext for his expulsion, the Government entrusted the Attorney-General with a motion declaring Wilkes guilty of an "insolent, scandalous, and seditious libel," which, although Dr. Blackstone himself objected that the matter should be left to a judge and jury, was passed by a large majority in the early hours of the morning.<sup>1</sup>

Later, when the House reassembled, on the same Friday which was to prove the most unlucky day the ministry had ever known, Lord Barrington, the Secretary at War, moved for the expulsion of Wilkes on the ground that he had published three libels, viz. *The North Briton*, the "Essay on Woman," and the Preface to Lord Weymouth's letter. True to its folly the Government took the whole responsibility upon its shoulders, although it might have left the matter to the House of Commons and have allowed a private member to propose the unpopular resolution. It was an error in tactics, also, to make the motion for expulsion a composite one, charging Wilkes with a series of accumulated crimes, the unfairness of the device being obvious, since some might vote to expel him for one offence, some for another, according to individual predilections.

During the course of the debate there was a remarkable instance of the vicissitudes of politics, George Grenville delivering a brilliant remonstrance against the expulsion. Care-worn and pale, torn by the cough that was hurrying him to his grave, he made a brave attempt to turn his fellow-members from their purpose, speaking better than he had ever done before, carefully weighing his words. Being in harmony now with Lord Temple he shared his brother's fierce animosity against Grafton, but there was no doubt

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 298; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part II., p. 554; *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 139-51.



that the change in his attitude towards Wilkes was perfectly sincere. A few months later, through his exertions, an act was passed depriving the House of Commons of the right to decide a disputed election, and he desired to put an end to all antagonism between the legislature and the electorate. "Let us look a little forward," he suggested, "and see in what difficulties a concurrence in the present measure will involve us. Mr. Wilkes will certainly be re-elected; you will expel again, and he will be again returned. What is to be done then, and how is so disgraceful a contest to terminate?" It was evident that the speaker realised that the freeholders of Middlesex were made of sterner stuff than the townsfolk of Aylesbury.<sup>1</sup>

It was a long and stormy debate, lasting till after three o'clock in the morning. Most of the ministerial orators spoke as though the three offences of which Wilkes was accused had created a disability that made his expulsion a matter of course. Some members, as Grenville had prophesied, gave their approval to certain parts of the charge and disapproved of others. Dr. Blackstone considered that Wilkes should be expelled because he had published the "Essay on Woman." Lord Frederick Campbell, the brother of the Duke of Argyll, believed that he should be driven from the House for having written the 45th number of the *North Briton*, while Jeremiah Dyson, who was regarded as an authority on the question, declared that Wilkes was disqualified from sitting in Parliament owing to his imprisonment. Some wished to punish the member for the County of Middlesex because he was a "blasphemer of his God," others because he was a "libeller of his King." From his seat among the Opposition Edmund Burke delivered an eloquent speech, warning the ministers of the folly of their ways, demanding scornfully how the three alleged offences could deprive the member for Middlesex

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 546-75; *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxix. 544-5; Stowe MS. 372, f. 29.

of the right of being elected into Parliament. Protest was useless, and the motion to expel Wilkes was carried by a majority of eighty-two.<sup>1</sup>

Of all the members in the House probably not one enjoyed himself as much as the condemned man. "Mr. Wilkes's behaviour on a solemn occasion," said the newspapers, "was acknowledged even by his opponents to be firm, manly, decent, revering, but not crouching." Though some thought that his speeches showed little skill, all were agreed that he bore himself with confidence. After the division he begged leave to address the House once more, but the request was refused peremptorily. On his return to prison, however, he gave vent to his indignation in another "handbill" to the "Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Middlesex." Assuring his constituents that his "courage was not appalled" nor his "spirit in the least abated," he appealed to them to assert their right "of naming their own representatives" by electing him once more. "If ministers can once usurp the power of declaring who *shall not* be your representative, the next step is very easy, and will follow speedily. It is that of telling you whom you *shall* send to Parliament, and then the boasted Constitution of England will be entirely torn up by the roots."<sup>2</sup> The contention was re-echoed with enthusiasm by his followers, and became one of the chief arguments against his expulsion.

The election took place at Brentford on the 16th of the month. Although the rain fell in torrents a great crowd assembled in front of the polling-booth. No candidate ventured to oppose the popular hero, and about twelve o'clock he was chosen for the second time "by the unanimous voice of above two thousand of the most respectable freeholders." James Townshend, member for West Loe,

<sup>1</sup> *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 151-184; *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii. 178-9; *Caldwell Papers*, Part II, vol. ii. p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 4, 8, 1769; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part II., 543-5.

and John Sawbridge, member for Hythe, both persons of influence in the City of London, proposed and seconded the nomination. Knowing that he could not fail to be re-elected Wilkes celebrated the day by giving a dinner in "his apartments" in the King's Bench prison to some of his influential supporters, at which the *pièce de resistance* was "a fine large swan." Music played all the while to this most pampered of prisoners, and during the afternoon a number of "Gentlemen on horseback, with drums beating, French horns playing, and colours flying, on their return from Brentford," rode close past his window "to felicitate him on his election." At night the gaol was illuminated, and "the evening concluded with the utmost joy and festivity." Next day, on the motion of Lord Strange, the House of Commons resolved that Wilkes was "incapable of being elected a member to serve in the present Parliament."<sup>1</sup>

Four weeks elapsed before the next contest, during which interval Wilkes inveighed against the ministers in a number of vigorous manifestoes to the Middlesex freeholders. It was not until the eve of the polling-day that a second candidate could be induced to enter the lists, when one Charles Dingley of Golder's Hill, an ex-private in the foot-guards, who, turning to commerce, had become the proprietor of a lucrative saw-mill on the New Cut at Limehouse, was persuaded by the Government to oppose the demagogue. The election took place on Thursday the 16th of March. Intimidation and threats failed to turn the valorous Dingley from his purpose. Shortly before the polling-day he had broken his knuckles on the teeth of Wilkes's attorney in a scuffle at the King's Arms Tavern in Cornhill, getting knocked down for his pains, and he made his appearance on the hustings at Brentford Butts on the morning of the contest, facing a derisive multitude without flinching, waiting patiently for some freeholder to propose him.

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 17, 18, 1769; *London Magazine*, xxxviii. 110; *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii. 228.

None, however, ventured to undertake the dangerous task, and when at last the disappointed candidate was induced by his friends to leave the scene, Wilkes was re-elected a knight of the shire for the county of Middlesex for a third time. On the next day the House of Commons again resolved that the election was null and void, and the Deputy-Clerk of the Crown was instructed to issue a new writ.<sup>1</sup>

Hitherto the struggle between the Government and the Middlesex freeholders had caused more amusement than indignation, the mob having watched the futile efforts to rob their hero of his constituency with laughter and derision. The contest now entered upon a more serious phase. Shortly after the third expulsion it became known that the ministers had secured a candidate who was resolved to oppose John Wilkes or perish in the attempt, and it was understood that he would have the support of all the power and influence of the Crown.<sup>2</sup> Henry Lawes Luttrell was the name of the Government champion, a colonel in the army, bold, sombre, and saturnine, a man who was thought to bear a personal grudge against the popular idol. Few reprobates of the day had earned a more unsavoury renown than his father, Lord Irnham, and the son, who had covered himself with odium during his undergraduate days at Oxford by the betrayal of a peasant girl, was almost as notorious for his lack of moral principle. At the family seat of Luttrellstown, near Dublin, a succession of notorious syrens reigned as mistress, Sophia Baddeley being probably the most remarkable.<sup>3</sup> As a general rule father and son were on the

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 16 and 17, 1769; *Town and Country Magazine*, i. 137, 166; *Chatham Correspondence*, iii. 352; *Letters of Lord Malmesbury*, i. 175-6; *Life of Lord Shelburne*, E. Fitzmaurice, ii. 186; *Representative Hist.*, F. H. B. Oldfield, iv. 173; *Cat. of Satirical Prints*, iv. 506-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 22, 1769; *Grenville Papers*, iv. 413.

<sup>3</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, iii. 626, iv. 177; *Mems. of Miss Arabella Bolton*; *Mems. of Sophia Baddeley*, v. 62-103; *The Diaboliad*, William Combe.

worst of terms, the latter on one occasion refusing a challenge to a duel that Lord Irnham had sent him on the ground that he was not a gentleman.

After the announcement of Colonel Luttrell's candidature the temper of the people underwent a swift change. At a mass meeting of the Middlesex freeholders in the Mile End Assembly Room it was resolved to return Wilkes to Parliament as often as the House of Commons expelled him. It became evident that the populace was prepared to plunge into rebellion in defence of the freedom of election. The mere presentation of an address to the king by some of the merchants of London excited the mob to the wildest fury, and the zealous loyalists passed through the streets on their way to St. James's Palace amidst a riotous multitude, who pelted the procession during the whole journey with volleys of sticks and stones. Shouts of "Wilkes and no king" rent the air, and outside the palace an angry crowd beat and insulted everyone who endeavoured to pass within. Noblemen were dragged from their carriages. Lackeys were rolled in the mud. Even a regiment of foot-guards did not intimidate the mob, who jeered at the muskets and dared the soldiers to fire. A hearse, draped in black, was driven down St. James's Street, displaying pictures representing the shooting of Allen in St. George's Fields and the bludgeoning of Clarke by the Irish chairman at Brentford. It was not until a troop of horse had charged upon the mob that the riot was quelled.<sup>1</sup> To all appearance the country was on the verge of revolution.

"Peace is at present restored," wrote Walpole a few days later, voicing the general opinion of the hour, "Peace is at present restored, and the rebellion adjourned to the 13th of April, when Wilkes and Colonel Luttrell are to fight a pitched battle at Brentford." The latter was

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 23, 1769; *Grenville Papers*, iv. 416; *Hist. of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 232-3; *Cat. of Satirical Prints*, iv. 514-16; *Works of T. Gray* (E. Gosse), iii. 339; *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, 10th Report, Appendix, Part I, 413-4.

believed to run so great a risk that odds were freely offered against his life, and the authorities looked forward to the polling-day with grave apprehension. Adequate preparations, however, were made to deal with the threatened rebellion. A proclamation had been published in the *Gazette*, and the capital was filled with soldiers. Yet, as the election drew nearer the Wilkites became less bellicose. The patriot's handbills to the Middlesex freeholders ceased to hurl threats against the Government. Some of the most influential of his supporters were anxious to prevent a renewal of the disturbances. Instructions were given to the committees that there must be no rioting.

The contest itself began to be amusing. In addition to Wilkes and Luttrell two other candidates took the field. Sergeant William Whitaker, an ambitious barrister of some ability but with more vanity, thrust himself into the fray in the hope that the Rockingham party would recognise him as the official Whig candidate, alive no doubt to the fact that if Luttrell were killed by the mob he might step into his shoes.<sup>1</sup> The other adventurous soul was Captain David Roach, nicknamed "Tiger," a conventional Hibernian swashbuckler, who had lived upon his wits with varied success for many years, often seeming to illustrate the contemporary adage that "if one threw a naked Irishman over London Bridge he would come up at Westminster in a laced coat and a sword." Ever since the affair of the general warrant this Tiger Roach had striven to win Wilkes's friendship by offering to "chastise" indiscriminately any Scotsman in Europe, and he came forward as a candidate, with Wilkes's permission, in the hope that he would be able to provoke Colonel Luttrell to cross swords with him. Small, pale, and scowling, with a black patch on his cheek and "a quivering eye," the appearance of the bully raised laughter throughout the constituency, where

<sup>1</sup> *Garrick Correspondence*, i. 340; *Grenville Papers*, iv. 419; Whitaker is caricatured as Sergeant Circuit in Foote's farce, *The Lame Lover*.

he was regarded as a mountebank put up by the witty Wilkes in travesty of his principal opponent.<sup>1</sup>

Good-humour continued to prevail on the morning of the election. The leaders of the popular party held their followers well in hand, and their organisation was as elaborate as usual. Never before had the processions of voters that marched to Brentford been so large or more imposing. Bands of music, waving standards, flags that displayed the stirring watch-words "Magna-Carta" and "Bill of Rights," cavalcades of horsemen four abreast, an endless stream of hackney-coaches draped in blue and full of exuberant freeholders with cockades in their hats, all these splendid tokens of Mr. Wilkes's power delighted the holiday crowds as they passed through the London streets. One high-spirited body, carrying the banners of the various societies to which this hero belonged (the Lumber Troopers, Antigallicans and the like,) halted outside Newgate to serenade one of their irrational fellows, named Captain Miles Allen, who had been shut up for sending a challenge to a member of Parliament, and then making their way to the Royal Exchange they shouted mockingly for the vanquished Dingley to go with them as their candidate. It was noted that many ladies were wearing breast-knots of blue and silver in honour of Wilkes.

The court party was able to make little display in response. It had been intended that Colonel Luttrell should ride to Brentford with a large escort of gentlemen, but scarcely more than a score kept their appointment, and the little band had to leave the house of the candidate by the back garden to avoid the crowd. On coming to Hyde Park Corner a jeering mob closed around the cavalcade, and though a few of them, including the candidate, managed to force their way to Knightsbridge, the rest were driven

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,867, f. 225; 30,868, f. 1; 30,870, f. 134; 30,876, ff. 23, 25; *Town and Country Magazine*, vii. 359, 657; *Covent Garden Magazine*, iii. 118; *St. James's Chronicle*, 22-25, Oct. 1763; *Middlesex Journal*, June 4, 1774; *Ann. Register* (1775), p. 237; *Musgrave's Obituary*, vi. 270.

back to town. True to his resolve Luttrell made his way to Brentford and mounted the hustings, but had it not been for the protection of James Townsend, who, being a prominent Wilkite, was able to control the people, it is probable that he would have paid for his intrepidity with his life.

It was not till after five o'clock that the poll was closed. Although the number of votes obtained by Wilkes was less than at the first election, his total being only 1143, Luttrell received no more than 296, while 5 were given to Sergeant Whitaker. Early in the forenoon Tiger Roach withdrew his candidature, it being noised abroad that he had been bribed by the Government. After the election was over the mob returned in triumph to London, several thousand strong, "with colours flying and music playing," and, marching through St. James's Street past the royal palace, they made their way to the King's Bench prison "to congratulate Mr. Wilkes on his success." At night there were illuminations "from Northumberland House all through the city, but," probably because the town was full of soldiers, "no riot nor compulsion."<sup>1</sup>

On the next day the election was once more declared null and void, and it was rumoured that Messrs. Townsend and Sawbridge might be expelled by the House of Commons for their temerity in proposing Wilkes after he had been thrice rejected. During the debate young Charles James Fox, a handsome and eloquent maccaroni, the son of Lord Holland, whose juncture with Bute had called *The North Briton* into being, spoke warmly in favour of the expulsion, showing plainly that the Tories at last had produced another great orator.<sup>2</sup> On the following afternoon George Onslow, one of the demagogue's renegade friends, proposed that Colonel Luttrell "ought to have been returned,"

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 14 and 15, 1769; *London Magazine*, xxxviii. 218; *Political Reg.*, iv. 292-6; *Hist. MSS. Com.*, 10th Report, Appendix X, Part I, p. 415; *Walpole's Letters* (Toynbee), vii. 268-9; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, 235-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence of C. J. Fox*, i. 51.



contending that "when votes were given to a person incapable of being chosen these votes were looked upon as being thrown away and the person next on the poll was always elected." Although this argument, upon which the Government entirely based their case, was refuted by Sergeant Glynn, who showed that Wilkes was not disqualified by law but only by the vote of one part of the legislature, "the Sorry Motion-maker" carried his resolution by a majority of 54 in the early hours of Sunday morning.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this last provocation there was no popular demonstration, the Wilkites bearing the expulsion of their idol with amazing fortitude. The least incentive would have raised a riot, but no one seemed eager to arouse the mob. For at last, though so late in the day, the Opposition was ready to take up Wilkes's cause once more, and the shrewdest of the patriots preferred to await the result of parliamentary agitation. The first skirmish with the Government took place on the 8th of May, when, after considering a petition presented by the Middlesex freeholders, the House of Commons decided by a majority of 69 that Colonel Luttrell had been duly elected.<sup>2</sup> "A most glorious day," Earl Temple described it, "not a shadow of an argument in favour of the disqualification," and he considered that the minority had fought a good fight.<sup>3</sup> His satisfaction was justified. Although the Opposition was split up into several factions, and although many a true Whig regarded the question of the Middlesex election as merely a weapon with which to fight his way back to office, from that time onward it remained their best rallying-cry of all, Mr. Wilkes and his seat in Parliament continuing to be a subject of debate that every minister had most reason to dread.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 585-8; *Cavendish's Debates*, i. 366-86.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii. 451.

<sup>3</sup> *Chatham Correspondence*, iii. 357.

At one time or another during the next two years all the finest intellects in the land were occupied in the controversy. In both Houses the greatest orators made notable speeches to justify the decision of the Commons or in defence of the rights of the electorate. The most distinguished authors wrote letters to the newspapers and published elaborate tracts. In the daily journals and the monthly magazines the discussion was continued by a host of fluent pens.

The problem of the Middlesex election involved *three* distinct issues. The House of Commons claimed the right not only to expel the offending member, but to disqualify him from being re-elected until after a dissolution of Parliament, and, being defied by his constituency, to nominate another in his place. The ministers based their case upon the contention that the House of Commons must be the sole judge in regard to the seat of any of its members.<sup>1</sup> The patriotic party retorted that the electors had an inherent right of choosing their own representative, provided that he was not disqualified by the law of the land. The Government declared that the vote of the House of Commons in itself created a legal disability, and therefore the choice of Luttrell was an inevitable result.

Much forensic eloquence was devoted to this particular argument, Sir William Meredith, in a popular pamphlet entitled *The Question Stated*, protested that Wilkes still was "eligible of common right" and could not be disqualified but by an Act of Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Blackstone, in a *Letter to the Author of "The Question Stated,"* contended that since Wilkes was under the ban of a vote of the Lower House he was incapacitated by the law and custom of Parliament.<sup>3</sup> To which Meredith replied, in a *Letter to Dr. Blackstone*, that the law and custom of

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Duke of Grafton*, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> *The Question Stated* (G. Woodfall), 1769.

<sup>3</sup> *A Letter to the Author of "The Question Stated"* (C. Bathurst), 1769.

Parliament depended on the law of the land, and that there was no law in the Statute Book which deprived the popular candidate of the right of being re-elected by his constituents. "The whole Legislature can create an incapacity," he argued, "but the House of Commons alone cannot," and the proposition became one of the chief moral dogmas of the patriots.<sup>1</sup> It was open, however to the ministerial party to reply with some reason that the consent of the whole legislature in this particular case was merely a question of form, since it was obvious that the Upper House would have endorsed any resolution of the Lower, while the approval of the Sovereign must have followed as a matter of course.

The convictions of the extreme Tories, who, with strange inconsistency, were willing to attribute a species of divine right to a resolution of the House of Commons, were expounded by Dr. Johnson in a pamphlet called *The False Alarm*, the rhetoric of which is its most admirable feature. "A member of the House cannot be cited for his conduct in Parliament before any other court," the lexicographer declared with an odd confusion of issues, "and therefore if the House cannot punish him he may attack with impunity the rights of the people and the title of the King."<sup>2</sup> It was pointed out, however, a hundred times that the House of Commons was punishing Wilkes twice over for two of the offences that had caused his expulsion, while for another of his alleged crimes he might well have been prosecuted at common law. "If the Commons have only the power of dismissing for a few days the man whom his constituents can immediately send back," the Doctor maintained, in another oft-repeated proposition, "if they can expel but cannot exclude, they have nothing more than nominal authority, to which perhaps obedience never may be paid."<sup>3</sup> The obvious reply to which was the objection

<sup>1</sup> *A Letter to Dr. Blackstone* (G. Woodfall), 1770, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *The False Alarm* (T. Cadell, 2nd ed. 1770), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *The False Alarm*, p. 19.

that the House not only had expelled and excluded a disobedient member, but had proceeded to invade the rights of the electorate by choosing another man in his place.

In an able essay, entitled "The Case of the last Election for the County of Middlesex considered," the ubiquitous Jeremiah Dyson published the best defence, perhaps, of any pamphleteer on behalf of the Government, making a brave attempt to establish the tremendous proposition that the expulsion of a member of the House of Commons created in him such an incapacity to be re-elected that at a subsequent election any votes given to him were null and void, and that any other candidate, who, except the person expelled, had the greatest number of votes, ought to be the sitting member. Although quoting many precedents he failed to refute the unanswerable objection of "Junius," who argued that "it will be necessary to produce some statute in which that positive provision shall have been made, that special disability clearly created, and the consequence of it declared, or, if there be no such statute, the custom of Parliament must then be referred to, or some case or cases strictly in point must be produced with the decision of the court upon them. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

"If the Commons begin to tell a constituency whom it shall *not* choose," Wilkes had proclaimed in prophetic words, "they will proceed to tell it whom it *shall* choose."<sup>2</sup> After the decision of the House of Commons on the 8th of May the choice of Luttrell became the one grand point at issue, in comparison with which the powers of expulsion appeared nugatory and irrelevant. The opponents of the Government protested that if the House of Commons had the right of admitting members to sit in Parliament against an acknowledged majority of legal electors, the right of the freeholders to choose their own representatives had dis-

<sup>1</sup> *The Case of the last Election for the County of Middlesex considered* (T. Cadell, 1769); *Biographies of Wilkes and Cobbett*, Rev. J. S. Watson, pp. 78-80; *Letters of Junius* (Bohn, 1910), i. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Address to Middlesex Freeholders on Feb. 4, 1769.

appeared. No one denied that the Commons had the power to expel an obnoxious member, but although the Government quoted many precedents to suit its purpose, it failed to prove that a vote of the Lower House could act as a disqualification.

A quarrel between the legislature and the electorate is as futile and as undignified as a quarrel between a parent and an adult child. In the great controversy that raged around the Middlesex election it was passion and not reason that played the chief part. Had the ministers been fortified by a thousand precedents their policy towards the sitting member would have been neither wise nor expedient. No argument would convince the electors that the Government had either law or justice on their side in not allowing Wilkes, for whom more than 1100 had voted, to become their representative, and in seating Luttrell, who was supported by less than 300, in the place of their chosen man. When they had elected him originally he was not a prisoner, nor was he legally an outlaw, nor disqualified in any other way, and the administration had tacitly acknowledged the fact by doing nothing to interfere with his candidature. That he had been shut up since in the Marshalsea in St. George's Fields was regarded as a matter that merely concerned the Middlesex freeholders, who were aware, before they gave their votes after his expulsion, that they would be deprived of his services in Parliament for two years. Not only did the electors fail to comprehend how a mere resolution of the House of Commons, even though it was reiterated four times, could deprive them of the right of selecting their own representative, but they were embittered by the terms in which the resolution was framed.<sup>1</sup> The accumulated charges set forth in the motion under which Wilkes had been expelled were considered to be merely an excuse for ministerial tyranny. Everyone was convinced that the member for Middlesex would have been allowed to retain

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxii. 178.

his seat if he had done nothing to provoke the Government, and the arguments of the court party, believed to be manufactured to fit the occasion, seemed to ring hollow and insincere even when their logic was sound.

The struggle over the Middlesex election was not merely a struggle between the House of Commons and a particular constituency. It was a struggle between the Crown and Parliament on the one hand and the larger part of the nation on the other. If the freeholders of Middlesex had been as docile and subservient as the citizens of Aylesbury it is improbable that the expulsion of Wilkes would have caused much turmoil, but when his constituents refused to accept any other representative the whole country began to take sides in the fray. The object lesson was one of grave significance. What had happened to Middlesex to-day might be the fate to-morrow of any borough or county in the land! All persons of advanced political opinions, whether or not they admired the personality of John Wilkes, considered it their duty to espouse his cause. For the moment at least liberty seemed synonymous with his name.

The large majority, too, of his adherents were non-electors. If not coatless, as he himself had suggested, most of the Wilkites at any rate were voteless men. Hitherto, an extension of the franchise had been neither advocated nor desired. The great mass of the people were content to leave the British constitution undisturbed, and to order themselves lowly and reverently towards their betters. Now, and for the first time perhaps since "the glorious Revolution," the non-electors began to realise and regret his own impotency. From this date onward a definite agitation for Parliamentary reform was an established political phenomenon, and a party that advocated a more widely extended suffrage became an important element in the state. Although circumstances postponed the fulfilment of these ambitions for more than sixty years, the aspirations that were awakened during the contest over the Middlesex

election were never allowed to sleep. The pioneers of 1769 were the political ancestors—with a distinct and unbroken lineage—of the men who carried the Reform Bill of 1832.

The fight over John Wilkes's seat in Parliament had another and a still more important result. It warned the nation of a danger, which, although hastened by the reactionary policy of George the Third, had menaced the constitution also in the days of Walpole and of Pelham. The executive now held the legislature in complete subjection. The individual politician had lost all his independence. The majority in the House of Commons had become the humble obedient servant of the Government of the day. Its members were merely pawns in the political game and made every move as the ministerial hand directed them. From the moment of their election the supporters of the administration ceased to be representatives of the people, having sold themselves into bondage for seven years. At the same time the domination of the ministers was substantially confirmed by their disposal of patronage, any recalcitrant follower being paid his price if it was worth the while, and the recent manipulations in the Civil Service, whereby a host of clerks had become the nominees of the administration, had increased the influence of the party in power in an immeasurable degree.<sup>1</sup>

To the British nation, which has always cherished the principle of representative government, the threatened advent of a bureaucracy seemed an unwelcome change. Many staunch ministerialists were dismayed to see that the House of Commons had been muzzled and its members reduced to mere automata. Few had anticipated that party discipline would demand the surrender of all conscience and all initiative. From the time of the Middlesex election a natural reaction began to set in, and a series of counter-checks gradually won back a much fuller measure

<sup>1</sup> *Early History of C. J. Fox*, Trevelyan, pp. 31-3.

of independence for the individual member of Parliament.<sup>1</sup> The mutiny of leading statesmen, such as Chatham and Shelburne, Conway and Camden, was the first indication that the House of Commons would break away sooner or later from the fetters with which it was bound. Many influential members of the Opposition, in order to demonstrate that they at least were the representatives of the people still, began to make a practice of addressing public meetings, which, by affording the private politician the means of sheltering himself behind the opinion of his constituents, helped to undermine the authority of the Government. It became the custom for the electors to show that they expected some sort of allegiance from their own member by "issuing instructions" to him in the form of an address, petition, or remonstrance to Parliament or to the Crown. Yet, in spite of the greater freedom that was gained at last by the rank and file of the House of Commons, an *esprit de corps* and a love of common principles was alone sufficient to preserve loyalty amidst the great political parties of the state. Whether he has appeared in the guise of a monarch, a dictator, or as a constitutional statesman, the British Parliament has never tolerated the methods of the drill sergeant longer than it has been obliged.

With a loyal, an apathetic, and an industrious people upon which to work his will it had seemed probable that George the Third would succeed in his attempt to banish "revolution principles" from the theory of government, and might make himself as absolute a Sovereign as any Stuart or Tudor king. That he was successful only partially in his design, that he was unable to establish absolutism on any true foundation was due to the fact that thus

<sup>1</sup> Who was a person of much greater consequence from 1783 to the time of the great Reform Bill than he had been under the administrations of Grafton and North. The publication of Parliamentary debates, for which John Wilkes was mainly responsible, helped to bring about this result, but the change had its origin in the great upheaval that began in 1769.



early in his reign he found himself in bitter hostility to a large portion of his people. It is for this reason that the Middlesex election is one of the great constitutional landmarks of the eighteenth century. It is on this account that John Wilkes was one of the most important political personages of his time.

The other more important pamphlets on the Middlesex election, besides those mentioned in the text, are :

*A Letter from a Member of Parliament . . . on the . . . Middlesex Elections.* H. Hingeston, 1769

*The Speech of a Right Honourable Gentleman (i.e. George Grenville) on the Motion for Expelling Mr. Wilkes.* J. Almon, 1769.

*A Letter to the Right Hon. George Grenville.* [By John Wilkes.] Isaac Fell, 1769.

*A Fair Trial on the Important Question, or the Rights of Election Asserted.* [By Mackintosh, barrister.] J. Almon, 1769.

*A Letter to Samuel Johnson.* [By John Wilkes. J. Almon, 1770.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A HOLIDAY IN PRISON

1768-1770

**D**URING the many hundred years that the famous gaol existed in St. George's Fields no human being ever served a term of imprisonment within its walls under such happy conditions as John Wilkes. From first to last it must have been evident to him that he continued to be the most popular man in England. Any number of friends were allowed to visit him whenever they desired. His board was sumptuous, his lodging the best that the prison could provide. And, greatest solace of all, he was able to pursue his crusade on behalf of "Liberty" without hindrance, being permitted to write and publish whatever he chose, and to take counsel with the most militant of his supporters. Except that he was prohibited from leaving the gaol he was as much his own master as if he were living in his own house.

Anticipating a long imprisonment, his first consideration was to provide a home for his daughter, not wishing her to remain any longer in "the dismal dungeon of St. Sepulchre's." Polly Wilkes was now in her eighteenth year, a merry amiable girl with much charm of manner, and the grace and elegance of the well-bred Parisienne. In spite, however, of her sparkling black eyes she was inordinately plain, almost ugly, resembling her father in nearly every feature. The bond of sympathy between the two had become even stronger and closer still since their frequent partings, and she was more attentive than ever to his slightest wish, seeming to have no other thought but

to give him pleasure. In her estimation he was the greatest hero and the noblest martyr that the world had ever seen. Few women have shown so perfect an example of filial affection as the daughter of John Wilkes.

Suitable lodgings having been found at the house of Mrs. Henley in Prince's Court, Polly was allowed to set up an establishment on her own account with her devoted maid, La Vallerie, to take care of her. Apparently she was delighted to leave Mrs. Meade's home, and her mother does not seem to have offered any objection. "I hope in Prince's Court, as everywhere else," wrote her father, when she first told him of the new arrangement, "to give you every convenience, every elegance, every pleasure. I know your perfect prudence, and have every reliance on your good conduct in all things. The more you have been tried the more I have found reason to approve and love you. I can safely trust you to be your own mistress."<sup>1</sup> Now that he had endowed her with every accomplishment, he was anxious that she should prove also a good housewife. "I beg my dear girl to buy a house-book," he wrote later, "and to set down all expenses, beginning from the first of her coming to Prince's Court. Monday will be a good day to settle the whole, and to pay the week's expenses. One thing I insist on; which is, that my dear daughter does not deny herself any pleasure of any kind she chooses, and let me know what it is, and I will contrive it. . . . I never expend for myself with so much pleasure as for my dear girl."<sup>2</sup>

The King's Bench prison, which stood at the southwest corner of Blackman Street in St. George's Fields, was said by a contemporary historian to resemble "a neat little regular town." Lofty walls, thirty feet in height, surrounded the block of buildings, leaving sufficient space for a garden and recreation ground. Save for the turnkeys

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 284; Add. MS. 30,879, f. 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 286; Add. MS. 30,879, f. 126.

at the gate, there was nothing about the place to suggest that it was used as a gaol. Along either side of a broad thoroughfare—known as King Street—that ran through the centre of the prison, were rows of shops and tradesmen's stalls, around which a crowd of eager customers was to be seen during the whole day. Near the entrance stood a coffee-house, where the prisoner might read the daily journal over his morning pipe. A tavern and a tap-house farther down the road did as brisk a trade as any other in the borough of Southwark. There was a fives-court also that was much patronised by the younger inhabitants. Both the debtors as well as the convicts of the Court of King's Bench were free to roam about the gaol and amuse themselves as they pleased. At the end of King Street, standing in a small paved court enclosed from the rest of the yard, was a two-storied building called the State-house, containing twelve apartments *de luxe* for the benefit of privileged prisoners. In "the most spacious and pleasing room" on the first floor in this secluded portion of the gaol, with its windows overlooking St. George's Fields, John Wilkes took up his abode on the day of his commitment, and he was fortunate enough to retain it until his sentence expired.<sup>1</sup>

Zealous partisans vied with each other from the first in showering gifts upon the great man. "His table," said an eminent historian, "was daily furnished with the most rare and costly delicacies, presented to him by admirers." The articles of food which arrived at the gaol soon became a serious embarrassment. A piece of brawn, a firkin of rock oysters, a Cheshire cheese, a loaf of sugar, a brace of fat bucks, with turkeys, geese, and fowls, all sorts of fish and every kind of fruit, in season and out—these and similar commodities were delivered by the carrier in careless profusion several times a week. On his forty-

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, May 7, 1768; *My Own Life and Times*, Thomas Somerville, p. 160; *The State of Prisons*, John Howard, 243-4; *History of Surrey*, T. Allen, i. 147-8; *Old and New London*, E. Walford, vi. 66-7; *Cunningham's Handbook of London*, ii. 458.

third birthday the Chevalier d'Eon sent him a dozen smoked Russian tongues, regretting that they had not "the eloquence of Cicero" to "rejoice properly." Often a letter accompanied a particular present to intimate that it weighed forty-five pounds. Even before the hero had been elected an alderman a turtle was a favourite form of gift with his wealthy admirers, and during the month after his sentence had been pronounced he gave a "turtle feast" on two occasions to "persons of distinction." A silver medal, bearing his own portrait, was presented to him in commemoration of the first Middlesex election. A massive cup, worth a hundred pounds, was sent to him on his birthday. After he had been chosen by the ratepayers of Farringdon Without, a generous disciple gave him an alderman's gown that cost forty guineas. Before he had been in prison for twelve months a newspaper paragraph estimated that he had received presents to the value of £2000.<sup>1</sup>

*Bon vivant* always, though never a glutton, Wilkes revelled in the good cheer that was provided for him. Being the most gregarious creature that ever lived, his room was nearly always full of company, and he arranged a "grand entertainment" for some congenial spirits at least once a week. Yet he would not permit social amusements to hinder his crusade. Although "hardly serious at first," in the opinion of Junius, "he was now an enthusiast." His numerous manifestoes to the Middlesex electors shaped the political creed of every devout Wilkite. Almost daily a trenchant letter or a smart paragraph, written by his busy pen, appeared in one of the newspapers, breathing defiance against the Government. A committee of his principal supporters took counsel with him at frequent intervals to direct the policy of their adherents. But while he posed before the nation in his most dramatic guise, as the champion

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, July 2, 16, 23; Dec. 2, 1768; Jan. 3, 6, 9, 20; Feb. 2, 21; March 18; Aug. 7, 12, 21, 1769; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1769), p. 509; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 111-12.

of liberty and the martyr of freedom, the irrepressible humour of the man kept bubbling forth from time to time, and the scene was changed to one of farce or comedy. It was his greatest misfortune that he could only remain serious during limited periods.

It was a common thing for ladies in a delicate state of health to be seized with an inordinate longing to gaze upon the face of the captive patriot, and Wilkes with unfailing good humour was always ready to indulge their fancy. One day he was told that two curious gentlewomen were waiting at the lodge, anxious to see him. Ordering them to be shown up to his room he opened a bottle of wine, and when his guests had arrived he asked them to drink the toast—"a safe and speedy delivery to the three of us."<sup>1</sup> Owing mainly to his love of burlesque, anything droll or fantastic relating to the popular leader was sure to find its way into the newspapers. A sort of cabalistic humour was supposed to be associated with the number 45. If these figures were announced after a division a ripple of laughter would pass over the benches of the House of Commons. It was regarded as an amusing fact if 45 coaches drove in one day to the King's Bench prison, or when 45 tradesmen dined together off 45 pounds of beef in a room lighted by 45 candles.<sup>2</sup> In one of his frolicsome moods the patriot had the bad taste to send a superfluous turtle as a present to the Princess Amelia, the aunt of the king.<sup>3</sup> During his most serious moments a gibe was often on his lips. No public man could pass from jest to earnest with more rapidity.

A little later in his life he was scolded by Junius for another frivolous habit. "I would not make myself cheap," wrote the Great Unknown, "by walking the streets so much as you do."<sup>4</sup> At this period, though unable to

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 1768.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 3 and 7, 1769.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, ii. 355-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Junius* (Bohn, 1908), ii. 95.

walk abroad, he was always ready to make himself cheap by joining any club or community that asked for his patronage. The Brotherhood of All Souls, the Society of Hiccobites, the Noble Order of Free United Britons, the Honourable and Ancient Society of Leeches, these and many other similar associations enrolled him among their members.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, his willingness "to be all things to all men" affected his prestige almost as much as his love of buffoonery. Nearly everyone spoke of him affectionately, or referred to him contemptuously, as Jack or Johnny Wilkes. The familiarity that breeds contempt robbed him of the authority that should distinguish a great statesman.

A group of new friends, more useful and zealous than any political associates of former years, had now gathered around him. Some of them came to sup or dine with him in his luxurious cell at frequent intervals. John Horne, the maccaroni parson with one eye, who had reserved the two best inns at Brentford in Wilkes's interest during the first Middlesex election at his own expense, continued to be one of the most strenuous supporters of the popular cause.<sup>2</sup> In a lordly, patronising way Alderman William Beckford, the West India plutocrat, also allied himself with the combative little band, affording valuable assistance financially, and assisting in the battle in Parliament in his bluff, ostentatious style. A person of rather more culture and refinement, though inordinately ugly and an alderman too, John Sawbridge by name, was at this period perhaps the most enthusiastic among Wilkes's lieutenants. Sprung from an old county family living at Olantighe in Kent, he was supposed to have learnt his political philosophy from his sister, Mrs. Catherine Macaulay, who was the authoress of an imaginative work in praise of republican

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 7, 22, 29; May 19, 1769. About this time he became a Freemason. Mr. A. M. Broadley informs me that "John Wilkes was initiated on Feb. 18, 1769, in the Jerusalem Lodge at a meeting for the purpose by dispensation in King's Bench prison."

<sup>2</sup> *Life of John Horne Tooke*, A. Stephens, i. 94.







principles under the title of a History of England. Rich, honest, and indefatigable, he was a most valuable ally, though Wilkes, finding him much less pliable than he had hoped, soon came to the conclusion that he had "more mulishness than understanding."<sup>1</sup>

Less tractable still, as his firm, rugged features indicated plainly, Alderman James Townsend, who was sheriff along with Sawbridge in the year 1769, had been the most resolute supporter of Wilkes at each successive election, having been threatened with expulsion, together with his colleague, for nominating the demagogue after the House had declared that he was not eligible. Robust and eloquent, with a quick, hot temper and a fine courage, he revelled in the battle between Parliament and the Middlesex electors, showing himself as audacious as Wilkes in both word and deed. Of decent birth, having the prestige of a University education, a wealthy landowner and married to an heiress, he was a useful friend to those who could manage to work in harmony with him.<sup>2</sup> It was obvious, however, from the first, that he and Wilkes could not run together in double harness.

If Townsend was the Danton and Wilkes the Robespierre of the *comité de salut* that met in the State-house of the King's Bench prison, Richard Oliver, soon also to be an alderman, was its Marat. Born in a tropical land, the nature of the man seemed as intemperate as the climate of his birthplace, blazing at white heat both in his friendships and his enmities. Black and swarthy, with sharp features and thin cruel lips, the expression of his face was often sinister and vindictive, and when once his indignation had

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Junius* (Bohn), 1908, ii. 83; cf. *Mems. of Lord Rockingham*, ii. 96; *Life of J. Hynes Tooke*, A. Stephens, ii. 282; *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of N. Wrexall* (Wheatley), iii. 423.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 191; *Life of Lord Shelburne*, E. Fitzmaurice, ii. 287-8; *Citizens of London and their Rulers*, B. B. Oridge; W. P. Courtney in *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, v. 2-4; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1787), pp. 640, 738; *London Magazine* (1772), 507-8.

been aroused it was impossible for him to forgive. Scrupulously honest, he was always moved to fierce anger by any sign of meanness or guile, and he never feared to speak his mind however great the cost. Like his cousin and brother-in-law, Thomas Oliver, he was ambitious of civic honours, and few London citizens were more liberal and open-handed in their support of the patriotic cause.<sup>1</sup>

Another of Wilkes's trusted advisers was an ex-chaplain of George the Second, Dr. Thomas Wilson by name, rector of St. Stephen's, Walbrook, said to have been banished from the chapel royal for gross flattery of the reigning king. Though a man of character and intelligence, he made himself a general laughing-stock by his absurd adoration of Mrs. Macaulay, the female historian, to whom he erected a statue in his church, and idolised as the greatest genius of the age.<sup>2</sup> Several other old friends remained staunch in their allegiance. John Churchill, the popular apothecary of Westminster; Joseph Mawbey, the owner of the distillery and the pigs; poor Humphrey Cotes, who strove to pull the wires as vigorously as ever, all acted as a sort of general staff to the imprisoned demagogue, along with Sawbridge, Townsend, Horne, and Oliver. The pugilistic John Reynolds, who had knocked Dingley down, continued to be Wilkes's legal adviser, with the occasional help of Serjeant Glynn. Various members of the Common Council of London, such as George Bellas of Doctor's Commons, Samuel Vaughan of Mincing Lane, and Arthur Beardmore, Lord Temple's solicitor, proved themselves as ardent and as invaluable as any of the others.

At a meeting held at the London Tavern in Bishopsgate Street on the 20th of February 1769, the little band of stalwarts resolved to form a society in order to advance

<sup>1</sup> Mr. V. L. Oliver in *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, iv. 217; *The Controversial Letters of Wilkes and Horne*, pp. 141, 269, 291; *Public Advertiser*, April 27, 1771; Nov. 5, 1772.

<sup>2</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, iii. 681, viii. 675; *European Magazine*, iv. 332-4.



MR. SEBASTIAN CHAN   JOHN WILKES   MR. K. V. JOHN HORN



their political principles and to assist in the Wilkite crusade. Five days later they christened themselves the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, declaring that their sole aim was "to maintain and defend the legal, constitutional liberty of the subject." Previously, it had been agreed to "contribute as far as it lay in their power to the support of Mr. Wilkes," and a widespread appeal was made to the public for subscriptions.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the first article in their creed was the preservation of the freedom of parliamentary election, as prescribed in King William's famous statute, which was considered to have been violated in the Middlesex election. Subscriptions poured into their coffers in a steady copious stream. The rich merchants of London gave generously, and contributions were received from all parts of England. A wise appeal was made for popular sympathy by representing the patriot as one who had "suffered very greatly in his private fortune from the severe and repeated persecutions he has undergone on behalf of the public." It was urged in the preamble to the subscription paper that "the man who suffers for the public good should be supported by the public."<sup>2</sup> So encouraging was the response that his friends hoped to raise sufficient funds to satisfy Wilkes's creditors and to purchase him a substantial annuity.<sup>3</sup>

Though Horne and his colleagues began their work with easy confidence, they were soon dismayed by the enormity of the task. Wilkes's debts were unextinguishable. No sooner was one claimant appeased than a host of others submitted their demands. In the month of March it was estimated that the patriot owed about £14,000. Early in June the sum had increased to over £17,000. With his two fines and the addition of election expenses, the total

<sup>1</sup> *Controversial Letters of Wilkes and Horne*, pp. 150-1, 170-2; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 7-9; *Life of J. Horne Tooke*, A. Stephens, i. 162-4; *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 22; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1769), p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 8; *London Magazine* (1769), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of J. Horne Tooke*, A. Stephens, i. 167-8.

was raised to more than £21,000. Even then, bills to the amount of £7000 remained unpaid. Since it was impossible to discharge every debt in full the greater portion were compounded, several private creditors being generous enough to forgo a large part of their claims. And at the same time that they were freeing him from his embarrassments the Supporters of the Bill of Rights allowed Wilkes a grant of a £1000 a year for his personal use. From first to last it was calculated that the balance against him could not have been less than £30,000. Altogether the subscriptions received by the society only amounted to about two-thirds of this sum.

It was alleged by his apologists that Wilkes had incurred £7000 of these debts by becoming security for several of his friends, but they produced no evidence to show that anyone except ladies of easy virtue had profited by such generosity. The auditing of accounts disclosed many samples of reckless extravagance. More than £1000 was owed to Parisian jewellers. Lauchlin Maclean held a note of hand for £1200, advanced to save his friend from bankruptcy during his residence in France. Between four and five hundred pounds, borrowed at the same period, was due to the house of Foley. Panchaud, another banker in Paris, claimed £600. The pugilistic Reynolds had allowed himself to be drawn upon for £1500. There was a debt of £2000 contracted many years previously, owing to Silva, the Jew, which had been reduced or compounded—some said repudiated fraudulently—and Wilkes incurred much odium thereby. It was discovered also that he owed nearly £1000 to the Foundling Hospital at Aylesbury, the money being in his hands as trustee when he fled from the country after his duel with Martin. In a similar manner he had appropriated £800 belonging to the Buckinghamshire Militia, but in both instances he pleaded that he had been obliged to leave his affairs in the hands of Humphrey Cotes, whose failure had caused the sums to be lost.

Though not wilfully dishonest, Wilkes's carelessness in money matters was scarcely less reprehensible than fraud. Like most professional demagogues, he considered himself entitled to live at the public expense, in return for the benefits, which, in his opinion, he conferred upon the people. Greater statesmen than he have been equally slovenly in keeping their accounts.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the most agreeable tributes to his popularity at this period came from America. Ever since his imprisonment in the tower the colonists had taken a deep interest in his struggle against the Government, amazed that one man should be able to baffle all the resources of the Crown. Having similar grievances of their own, they could not fail to be gratified by the abolition of general warrants, and the incidents of the Middlesex election must have suggested the hope that the right of the people to elect those who were to govern them would be recognised to the full in their own states.<sup>2</sup> Since his brother-in-law, George Hayley, had a business connection with Boston it is probable that Wilkes was informed by American newspapers and American correspondents of the enthusiasm that he had awakened in the colonies. He would learn that his name had become a

<sup>1</sup> Until the Minute Book of the Bill of Rights Society is examined no complete balance sheet can be provided, setting forth the full details of Wilkes's debts. The reports of the secretary, published in the newspapers and magazines, together with the statements of Almon, Horne, and Wilkes himself, give a broad impression of the amount of the liabilities. See the numerous references in *The Controversial Letters of Wilkes and Horne*, *passim*; *Life of J. Horne Tooke*, A. Stephens, *passim*; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 7-13; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1769), p. 316, (1771) p. 89; *Town and Country Magazine* (1770), pp. 167, 221; *London Magazine* (1769), p. 218, (1772) p. 142; *Public Advertiser*, June 21, 1769; Feb. 21; April 16, 1770; Jan. 19, Feb. 23, May 7, June 18. Letters signed "Menenius" June 21, 26, 29, 1771; March 4, Nov. 5, 1772; *History of London*, J. Noorthonck, p. 479; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 111; Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 27, 75, 101, 108, 112, 117, 149, 215; Add. MSS. 30,869, ff. 8, 21, 22, 93, 117, 129; Add. MSS. 30,872, ff. 109, 135; Add. MSS. 30,879, f. 162; *Our First Ambassador to China*, H. M. Robins, 73.

<sup>2</sup> *History of America*, J. Winsor, vi. 11 n. Cf. *The Boston Gazette*, July 4, Aug. 29, 1768; July 17, 1769; *The Boston Chronicle*, June 29, 1769.



popular toast among all classes, and that the baptisms of a number of little John Wilkes were recorded frequently, it being a common custom to christen children after him. The innumerable references in the leading journals must have convinced him that he had as many sympathisers in America as in England.

The first direct communication came to him from the Committee of the Sons of Liberty at Boston, the title of whose Society had been borrowed from an expression used by Colonel Barré in the House of Commons on the 5th of February, 1765. It was signed by Benjamin Kent, Thomas Young, Benjamin Church, junior, John Adams, and Joseph Warren, and arrived at the King's Bench prison about a month after the patriot had received his sentence. It offered congratulations on the result of the first Middlesex election, and thanked him for his brave struggle in the cause of freedom. Wilkes was much flattered by the attention, sitting down immediately to answer the letter, and assuring the Sons of Liberty that the interests of America should be "the study of his life."<sup>1</sup> Much correspondence followed, the Committee sending three more elaborate addresses to Wilkes during his imprisonment, and doing him the honour of drinking his health on every 14th of August when they assembled at Liberty Tree to celebrate the day of the union.<sup>2</sup> Two of the numerous turtles were sent by the same admiring friends. Yet, the enthusiasm of Boston was far exceeded a little later by the people of South Carolina, who contributed through their House of Assembly a subscription of £1500 towards the payment of the patriot's debts.<sup>3</sup>

No events in England gave greater encouragement to the militant party in the American colonies than the achievements of John Wilkes. From first to last they

<sup>1</sup> *Controversial Letters of Wilkes and Horne*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,870, ff. 75, 135, 222; *Boston Gazette*, Aug. 22, 1768; *Boston Chronicle*, Aug. 21, 1769.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1770), p. 94; *Annual Register* (1770), p. 71.

regarded his cause with as deep an interest as if it had been their own. It was natural that they should sympathise with the English rebel. The Parliament that proscribed him was the same which imposed unwelcome taxation upon themselves. George Grenville, his first persecutor, was the author of the Stamp Act. The ministry of Grafton, which had expelled him from the House of Commons, had been more hostile to colonial aspirations than any of its predecessors. In trying to vindicate the rights of the electorate against the encroachments of the executive he was fighting for a principle which all American patriots hoped to see recognised in their own land. His numerous victories on behalf of liberty served to remind every discontented Yankee that they "who would be free themselves must strike the blow." Perhaps, had they never been inspired by his brave example, they might not have dared to break their chains so soon.

The second birthday passed by Wilkes in prison, when he entered into his forty-fifth year, was celebrated by his admirers all over England with greater enthusiasm, but was not marked by as much popular disturbance as the anniversary of the year previous had been.<sup>1</sup> By now the excitement of the Middlesex election had faded away, and with a general increase of prosperity throughout the country the old turbulent spirit in a great measure had disappeared. Moreover, Wilkes's "general staff" set their faces sternly against all forms of riot and disorder. A new method was discovered of showing disapproval of the Government by bombarding the king with petitions to dissolve Parliament, the counties of Middlesex, Surrey, and Yorkshire, with the cities of Bristol, Liverpool, and Newcastle, amongst many others joining in the protest.

Although Grafton's ministry was obviously moribund at the commencement of the New Year, Chatham, Shelburne, and Camden, its three brightest stars, having de-

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 30, Nov. 3, 1769.

serted in turn, George the Third would not consent to a dissolution, declaring that he would prefer civil war rather than yield.<sup>1</sup> A heavy blow was delivered against the Government and a great compliment paid to Wilkes at the opening of the session by an amendment to the address, moved by Lord Chatham, begging the House to "take into consideration the causes of the prevailing discontent and particularly the proceedings of the House of Commons touching the incapacity of John Wilkes."<sup>2</sup> On the 27th of January, 1770, weary of office, Grafton at last proffered his resignation, which the king, who was glad to make a change of ministers, accepted without demur. Grown tame and impotent under the flabby leadership of Rockingham, the Opposition was unable to offer any effective challenge to their opponents, and a new administration was formed by the king's friends with Lord North as Prime Minister. Its policy in all matters relating to the Middlesex election was the same as that of its predecessor.

Nearly twenty months of Wilkes's sentence had now expired and only ten weeks more of imprisonment remained. For some time the newspapers had begun to count the days that must elapse before his enlargement. From the first his health had been splendid, a bilious attack now and then being his only ailment. Owing to lack of exercise and a sumptuous fare his slim figure had increased somewhat in bulk, a condition, so the wags declared, very suitable to a city alderman. With his fellow-prisoners he was immensely popular, being in the habit of distributing his superfluous provisions amongst them all.<sup>3</sup> Presents continued to pour in upon him to the end, and his friends flocked to his supper parties as eagerly as ever. Very frequently too his smart, merry Polly, chaperoned by old grandmother Wilkes, would

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iv. 41.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 652; *Chatham Correspondence*, iii. 368-74; *Letters of Eminent Persons to David Hume*, pp. 91-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 10, Feb. 10, June 16, 1769.

pay him a visit, with a laugh and a look of love for every word that he spoke.

Ladies often came to call upon him, both singly and in company, the prison regulations placing no restrictions upon their admittance, and all the pretty ones were sure to receive an invitation to come again. With one of his fair visitors, Mary Otto by name, Wilkes became much infatuated, entreating her to visit him alone, and striving without effect to persuade her to leave her protector.<sup>1</sup> Another of his lady friends, although a married woman, was more complaisant. Mrs. John Barnard, the wife of the son of a famous alderman of London, was in the habit of coming to see him in company with her husband, who was a warm supporter of the patriotic cause, and occasionally, for she had been Wilkes's mistress before her marriage, she used to come alone. Although Mr. Barnard was one of his best and most generous friends, the amorous patriot sighed after his former love still, hoping to renew their tender relations again. Many affectionate letters passed between the two, and the clandestine interviews took place as often as they dared, but no suspicion of the truth ever crossed the husband's mind. He would have as soon expected such an injury from a brother.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of Wilkes's extravagance his fortune had been little impaired during his exile. By living on credit, with the help of loans from his friends, it had been unnecessary to dip into capital any further. Since the Supporters of the Bill of Rights had volunteered to discharge his debts there was no need to realise other portions of his estate. At the end of his imprisonment his income was not much less than it had been when he fled from his native land. After all deductions it amounted to about £350, in spite of the rapacity of Reynolds, his addle-pated solicitor. A

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,875, f. 234. Cf. Wilkes's Address Book, Add. MSS. 30,892.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B., f. 48 and *passim*.

few months before his release a windfall of £4000 had come to him, awarded by the jury that tried his long-protracted law-suit against Lord Halifax, a welcome sum, though he had claimed five times as much, for it enabled him to pay off the old debt to the Buckinghamshire militia. With the annuity of £1000, granted by the Bill of Rights enthusiasts, the debtor was in affluent circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Wilkes was released from prison on the evening of Tuesday the 17th of April, 1770. To divert the attention of the crowd Miss Wilkes drove out in a coach first with a male friend, and, while the mob was closing around the vehicle in the belief that their idol was inside, he was hurried away in a chaise and four in the opposite direction. The ruse failed, though the postillions drove as fast as they could. Before the windmill in Blackman Street was reached the carriage was blocked by the crowd, hundreds of jubilant souls having caught a glimpse of the familiar face grinning and squinting behind the glass pane, and Wilkes was forced to use all his powers of cajolery to dissuade the people from drawing him in triumph through the town. At length after a long parley he prevailed upon his admirers to let him depart in peace, and he proceeded with his companions, Messrs. Churchill and Trevanion, without any further adventure to the country house of his solicitor, near Bromley in Kent.<sup>2</sup>

On the following morning he published a new address to the freeholders of Middlesex. Though he realised well enough that his imprisonment had been no hardship, he referred to his "sufferings of the last two years." With unconscious humour he declared that "the trial was indeed long and severe" and spoke pathetically of "the many tedious months of his long confinement," unmindful of the feasting and carousals and the visits of fair dames. Once

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 13; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 263; *Controversial Letters between Wilkes and Horne*, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 19, 1770; Wilkes's Diary, Add. MSS. 30,866.

more he reminded his supporters of the general warrant, and denounced "the horrid massacre" in St. George's Fields. He inveighed against the House of Commons for its decision in the Middlesex election; he protested that it was "no longer a just and fair representative of the collective body of all the electors," and he clamoured for the dismissal of the "corrupt and despotic administration." It was a brave and forcible outburst in the true Wilkes style.<sup>1</sup>

The release of the famous prisoner was celebrated all over the country either on the Tuesday or the Wednesday evening. London was ablaze with light, the houses of William Beckford and the Duke of Portland being the most brilliant of any, but owing to a downpour of rain and the presence of troops there was no rioting. Illuminations were general in the provinces, with fireworks, bonfires, and ringing of bells. Numerous parties of forty-five sat down to joyful symposiums, and hogsheads of ale were given away to the people. In a western town Colonel Luttrell was hung in effigy in the market-place. America, too, made the day a day of festival. The union flag was displayed on Liberty Tree amidst the cheers of a great crowd, and at a banquet in Boston the health of "the illustrious martyr to liberty" was the first on the list of toasts.<sup>2</sup>

A week after his release Wilkes attended his first public function, appearing at the Guildhall to be "sworn in" as an alderman. "The greatest concourse ever known on a like occasion" gave him an uproarious welcome into the city, and he noted with amusement that even the most hostile of his brother aldermen received him with apparent cordiality. After the ceremony he was driven in the state-

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton* (W. Bingley), vol. ii., Part I, p. 378; *Public Advertiser*, April 18, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 19, 23, 28, May 2, 1770; *Town and Country Magazine*, ii. 221; *London Magazine*, p. 219; *Hist. MSS. Com.*, 10th Report, Appendix, Part I, 423; *Life of H. Grattan*, i. 163; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 375; *Boston Gazette*, April 23, 1770.

coach to the Mansion House, where a splendid banquet was held in his honour by Lord Mayor Beckford. The patriot, who was dressed in a full-trimmed suit of black, bore himself in regal style, and was obviously gratified by the warmth of his reception. No such crowd had been seen in the streets since the coronation.<sup>1</sup>

A week later he was the subject of a historic debate in the Upper House, Lord Chatham presenting a bill "for reversing the adjudications of the House of Commons, whereby John Wilkes, Esq., has been judged incapable of being elected a member to serve in the present Parliament." Though the old statesman had no desire for an alliance with the demagogue, either personal or political, he had become one of his most strenuous advocates in the question of the Middlesex election. On the present occasion his speech was described by Wilkes himself as a great one. "Here are 1143 legal, sworn freeholders," he declared, "who vote a gentleman their member of Parliament against 296 who oppose him. With this apparent majority he comes to take his seat so given him by the laws and constitution of his country. But what do the House of Commons? Why, they shut the door in his face, and, by a new state-arithmetic, make 296 a greater number than 1143. Is not this, my lords, flying in the face of all law and freedom?" The task of replying for the Government devolved upon Lord Mansfield, who argued that since "Mr. Wilkes was a nobody in the eyes of the law, therefore Colonel Luttrell had no opposition," and the bill was thrown out by a majority of forty-six. Thirty-three of the peers, headed by Chatham, Camden, and Rockingham, adopted the unusual course of signing a protest against the rejection.<sup>2</sup>

On the 23rd of the month one of Lord Chatham's most loyal followers, inspired by the example of his leader,

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 25 and 27; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Chatham Correspondence*, iii. 449; *Mems. of Lord Rockingham*, ii. 177; *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 955-65; *Life of Lord Mansfield*, J. Holliday, p. 272.

ventured to offer a public protest against the Middlesex election at the steps of the throne. It was on the occasion when the second "Address, Remonstrance, and Petition" from the City of London was presented at St. James's Palace, and the intrepid politician was William Beckford. After the king had made an evasive reply in answer to the protest of the Common Council, the Lord Mayor stepped forward and delivered a speech. It was a loyal and respectful oration, but entirely out of order and unprecedented, and its whole purport was to emphasise the fact that the mercantile class was bitterly hostile to his Majesty's Government.<sup>1</sup>

Neither the eloquence of the great statesmen nor the audacity of the rich and popular Lord Mayor could prevail upon George the Third to reopen the question of the Middlesex election. So far he had gained a decisive victory. The agitation in favour of Wilkes had spent its force, and although the demagogue remained as popular as ever, it was manifest that his political influence would grow no greater than it had been. Having realised that nothing but civil war could turn Colonel Luttrell out of his seat, the zeal of hundreds of sturdy Wilkites had oozed away. The patriot too seemed content to rest upon his laurels, devoting his energies to make himself the autocrat of the city. The king, however, had merely crushed his enemies for the moment, but it is scarcely probable that the pleasure of his triumph was disturbed by the knowledge that the Middlesex election had kindled a flame which he would never be able to beat out.

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, May 24 and 25, 1770; *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 101-2.



CHAPTER XV  
THE SHRIEVALTY  
1770-1772

WILKES'S first task after leaving prison was to find a suitable residence for his daughter and himself. Having £4000 in ready cash and a yearly income of nearly £1400, there was no reason why he should remain in his old lodgings at Mrs. Henley's. A few days after his release, with characteristic unselfishness, he allowed Polly to pay a visit to Paris, at the invitation of Madame de Chantereine, in order that she might see the Dauphin's wedding, so his house-hunting had to be done alone. Wishing to live near his old home, he secured a lease of No. 7 Prince's Court, the last house at the end of Great George Street, by Storey's Gate, with its windows facing Birdcage Walk, paying the moderate rent of fifty guineas a year. At the same time, deeming it necessary to have a country cottage during the summer months, he took a furnished villa in Elysium Row, Fulham.<sup>1</sup>

For a short period he hesitated to devote himself seriously to civic affairs, feeling instinctively that he would be out of his element. "I am determined not to be sheriff unless Parliament be dissolved before midsummer," he informed his daughter soon after he had made his début in the Guildhall, wisely regarding the shrievalty as a matter of minor consequence. At that moment, however, there

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 25, 31-2; *Controversial Letters between Wilkes and Horne*, pp. 176, 191-2; *Memorials of Westminster*, M. E. C. Walcott, p. 73; J. Dixon in *Notes and Queries*, 5th series, xii. 513; *Public Advertiser*, May 12, 1770. His house in Fulham was known as the Balcony House.

was no other career to occupy his restless energy, and it seemed probable that the Government would remain in office for another five years. Fearing, perhaps, that he might fall into obscurity, he allowed his new friends to persuade him to join in the struggle against the court party in the city. It was a fall as stupendous as that of Lucifer! In descending from imperial to local politics, Wilkes found himself involved in a hundred petty squabbles and ignoble jealousies with which he need have had no concern. Men like Sawbridge, Townsend, and Oliver, to whom he was immeasurably superior in wisdom and intelligence, would have accepted him as their political leader without question instead of regarding him as an unwelcome rival, had he not invaded their own special domain. It was a tactical error of the greatest magnitude and the only one that Wilkes ever made.

From the onset he plunged into his new life with characteristic impetuosity. In his letters to his daughter there were constant references to the sessions at Guildhall and the meetings of the Common Council, and he related how he had been "sitting in the seat of justice for the lord-mayor" at the Mansion House.<sup>1</sup> At the Court of Aldermen he was always in his place. Civic business monopolised the whole of his working day. With the exception, too, of his weekly visits to the Beef Steak Club most of his social engagements were connected with his municipal work. When public banquets did not claim his presence he was always a welcome guest at the table of one of his city friends. In a diary that he kept at this period he duly recorded each place where he dined.<sup>2</sup>

Though all were proud to sit at dinner with the famous wit, many a distinguished merchant had cause to remember his bitter tongue; for he loved to aim his shafts at aldermen and common-councillors. At a Lord Mayor's dinner

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 30, 59, 62.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,866 *passim*.

one afternoon he observed a certain civic dignitary, who had begun life as a bricklayer, helping himself plentifully to the cheese.

"Why, Mr. Burnel," said Wilkes, "you lay it on with a trowel."<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion at a city banquet a vulgar deputy, who was in the habit of taking off his wig and dining in a night-cap, asked the demagogue if his head-gear became him.

"Oh yes, sir," was the answer, "but it would look much better if it were pulled quite over your face."<sup>2</sup>

Once a dispute arose between Wilkes and the councillors of Farringdon Without on a question of policy.

"Well, Mr. Wilkes," said one of them, "we must take the sense of the ward."

"With all my heart," the alderman retorted scornfully, "and I will take the non-sense and beat you ten to one."<sup>3</sup>

When dining one day with a friend at the King's Head chop-house he was annoyed by an ostentatious citizen, who kept on bawling for his steak.

"See the difference between the city and the bear-garden," sneered Wilkes; "there the bear is brought to the stake, but here the steak is brought to the bear."<sup>4</sup>

A foolish young common-councilman happened to observe that it was a singular fact that he should have been born between twelve and one o'clock on the 1st of January.

"Not at all," snapped Wilkes, "considering that you must have been begotten on the 1st of April."<sup>5</sup>

Sir Watkin Lewis, one of the most loyal of his brother aldermen, losing patience at last with his domineering leader, declared in a rage, "I'll be your butt no longer."

<sup>1</sup> *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 46; *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1820), Part I, 6.

<sup>4</sup> *The Olio*, Francis Grose, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 227.

"With all my heart," said Wilkes; "I never like an empty one."<sup>1</sup>

Often some of his intimates, like John Churchill or Humphrey Cotes, made a point of remonstrating with him upon his rudeness to his city colleagues, asking if he were not afraid of losing his friends.

"Friends!" cried Wilkes, "these fellows are my followers, and they are now somebody. But they very well know what they would be were they once out of my suite."<sup>2</sup>

It was in this spirit that he behaved and talked at Guildhall and the Mansion House, seldom choosing to disguise his contempt for his fellow citizens. And, although he was good-humoured always, even when his gibes were most keen, it was inevitable that his wit should cost him many an adherent.

Having lived the busy life of an alderman for three months, Wilkes left London for the holiday tour which he was in the habit of making at this time of the year. Polly returned from France to accompany him, and he was waiting at Dover to welcome her when she stepped off the packet on the 3rd of August, overjoyed to have her back again after her long absence.<sup>3</sup> A triumphal progress followed, the demagogue receiving a royal reception in every town through which he passed. At Canterbury, at Maidstone, and at Tunbridge Wells the people made high holiday as long as he stayed amongst them. Colours decked the streets, the church bells were set ringing, and cannon thundered his usual salute of forty-five guns. During a short visit to Alderman Sawbridge at Olantighe the most reputable of Wilkites were summoned to meet him, and all bowed down and worshipped the honoured guest. It was the same in Brighton, which from this time onward became

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, July 30, 1775; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 227  
*Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 225.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkes's Diary. Add. MSS. 130,866.

one of his favourite haunts,<sup>1</sup> "all degrees of people treating him with the greatest marks of respect." When he returned to London at the end of his holiday he had good reason to be proud of his popularity in the south-eastern counties.<sup>2</sup> For many a long year the news that Mr. Wilkes was coming would excite the inhabitants of a country town as much as the promise of a circus.

During the month of October he was engaged in a fresh skirmish with the Government. One day, while acting as sitting alderman at Guildhall, a journeyman barber named John Shine was brought before him. Sailors were wanted in the fleet, and the man had been seized by virtue of a warrant from the Lords of the Admiralty, ordering "seamen and seafaring men to be impressed." Although the warrant was backed by the Lord Mayor, Wilkes declared that "pressing" was illegal within the liberties of the city, and without inquiring whether Shine had ever been a seaman he ordered him to be discharged. A great hubbub arose, and for a time it seemed as though Press Warrants were destined to cause as much trouble as General Warrants had done previously, for numbers of sailors were released by other aldermen. The people, however, were filled with martial ardour, public opinion by no means supporting the conduct of the demagogue. Finally the case was submitted to Messrs. Dunning, Glynn, and Wedderburn, whose report was entirely hostile to the Wilkes doctrine. The ministers, nevertheless, made no attempt to punish him for his audacity.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of the same month a dispute arose between Wilkes and Sawbridge, the first of a long series of dissensions that soon divided the popular party in the city into

<sup>1</sup> "Wilkes at Brighton," Dutton Cooke in *Belgravia*, xxvii. 295.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Aug. 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28; Sept. 3, 1770.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 26, 29, Nov. 24, 26, 1770, Nov. 25, 1776; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1770), p. 484; *London Magazine* (1770), p. 534; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iv. 121, 131; cf. *Rems. of Charles Butler*, i. 68.

two hostile factions. It occurred at a great meeting of malcontents held at Westminster Hall for the purpose of making inflammatory speeches against the Government. Wilkes, who was chosen to preside, proved an inefficient chairman, being inaudible to the majority of the vast assemblage, and one of the audience, "with a voice as loud as a speaking trumpet," had to interpret the motion which the patriot had proposed. The meeting, moreover, thought that his proposals were futile, for he clamoured wildly for the impeachment of the Prime Minister, and a resolution in favour of a new Remonstrance to the King, moved by Alderman Sawbridge, was carried instead. It was a blow to the prestige of Wilkes, teaching the envious city magnates that he was not omnipotent, and might be opposed successfully by those who had the courage. With the multitude, however, his popularity was undimmed. By a clever explanation of his defeat he was able to depreciate the triumph of his enemies.

"I have a real pleasure," he declared, "in finding out and following the opinion of the people. . . . I firmly and sincerely believe *the voice of the people* to be *the voice of God*. I wish always to hear it clear and distinct. When I do I will obey it as a divine call."<sup>1</sup>

Though Wilkes was anxious to prevent a breach of friendship with the opulent Sawbridge, there was never the same cordiality between them after their disagreement in Westminster Hall. The autocratic John was soon on bad terms also with several of his brother aldermen, and letters in the newspapers from impulsive partisans added fuel to the flames. Fierce disputes broke out amongst the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, the weary task of grappling with kaleidoscopic balance-sheets trying the temper of many who were not renowned for amiability at the best of times. Alderman Townsend, stubborn in every way as Wilkes himself, objected to the payment of a recent debt amount-

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 1, 2, 10, 1770.

ing to £1000, and the patriot retaliated by accusing his colleague of keeping out of the way on purpose while other magistrates were challenging the Press Warrants.<sup>1</sup> Since Sawbridge and Townsend were the closest allies this latest quarrel widened the schism among the patriots.

About the same time the volatile Parson Horne joined the mutineers, furious that Wilkes should regard himself as the dictator instead of the humble obedient servant of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights. When he founded the Association he did not expect that it would devote itself solely to the interests of one man, aspiring to make it a general benefit society for the aid of all political martyrs. Wilkes, on the other hand, knowing full well that his personal magnetism had attracted every farthing that had been subscribed, was disgusted that a portion of the funds should be diverted from his pocket. The rupture was aggravated by the letters of several anonymous correspondents, supposed to have been prompted by Wilkes himself, who insinuated in the newspapers that the Brentford parson had stolen some of the donations. Glynn and Oliver hastened to protest that the charges were preposterous, and though taking no further part in the quarrel their sympathies obviously were on the side of Horne. It was fortunate for Wilkes, in this rebellion of his most valuable supporters, that he still had comrades like Churchill, Cotes, and Wilson, who believed that he could do no wrong.<sup>2</sup>

By way of interlude he was engaged at the same moment in a fierce fracas with his old friend Lauchlin Maclean, who had sent to demand the repayment of an ancient debt. Believing that he had been basely deserted by this man, just as he had been deserted by William Fitzherbert, owing to political exigencies, Wilkes had held no communication with him for several years. There was a

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 19, 21, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Horne Tooke*, A. Stevens, i. 168-79; *Controversial Letters between Wilkes and Horne*, pp. 1-25; *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 17, 18, 1771.



CRISP MOLINEUX

*From a portrait by Opie in the possession of Major Montgomerie of Garleddisham Old Hall*





certain significance in the quarrel, since Lauchlin Maclean, like Alderman Townsend, belonged to a small faction led by Lord Shelburne, who after disapproving of the ministerial prosecution of Wilkes from first to last, now regarded the demagogue as an unnecessary evil, who ought to be driven from political life. Long before, Wilkes had given the earl his nickname of Malagrida, thinking him as crafty and subtle as a Jesuit priest, and he believed that the influence of the Shelburne coterie was directed against him in all his works.<sup>1</sup>

A journey to the eastern counties in the month of February came as a welcome relaxation in these troublous times. The town of Lynn in Norfolk had invited him to receive the freedom of the corporation, prompted no doubt by his friend Crisp Molineux of Garboldisham, a genial old rascal, who had contested the borough unsuccessfully at the previous election. Although the convivial Crisp, invalidated by an attack of gout, was unable to be present, the function was a complete success, the enthusiasm of the people and the splendour of the entertainment surpassing all expectations. East Anglia was one of Wilkes's great strongholds. During this journey he spent one night at Upwell, near Wisbech, with Francis Dixon, the tenant of one of his few remaining farms, paying a visit also to Cambridge in spite of the snow, where he stayed at the Rose Inn for three days. On Sunday evening he attended Trinity College chapel. The anthem was from the 116th Psalm: "I am well pleased that the Lord hath heard the voice of my prayer." After the service an admiring undergraduate presented him with the book of anthems, murmuring with enthusiasm, "I am well pleased." And Wilkes handed on the gift to a pretty woman near him,

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 29, 30; Feb. 1, 2, 4, 1771; Add. MSS. 30.871, ff. 56, 57; *Notes and Queries*, 1st Series, iii. 378, viii. 619; *Papers of a Critic*, C. W. Dilke, ii. 38-9; *Life of Goldsmith*, J. Prior, i. 149-52; *Works of Hugh Boyd*, L. D. Campbell, p. 19; *Letters of Junius* (Bohn, 1908), i. 77, ii. 347-8.

much gratified to find that he had found favour with many junior members of a great university.<sup>1</sup>

Two days after his return to London a plot that he had laid to embroil the House of Commons with the city of London suddenly came to a head. For some time he had been encouraging the newspaper proprietors in the forbidden practice of publishing parliamentary debates, promising the protection of the magistrates in case of prosecution. On the 19th of February, Colonel George Onslow, member for Guildford—a cousin of the other George Onslow, Wilkes's renegade friend—made a complaint to the House of Commons that the publishers of *The Gazetteer* and *The Middlesex Journal* had misrepresented the speeches of members, and the offenders were ordered to attend at the bar. On the advice of Wilkes both of them ignored the summons. Thirsting for vengeance, Onslow moved an address to the king to issue a proclamation, offering a reward to any person who should arrest the two men, and unfortunately for the dignity of the House the resolution was carried into effect.<sup>2</sup>

On the next morning, when the proclamation appeared in the *London Gazette*, Wilkes realised that chance had given him the opportunity of making the British Parliament the laughing-stock of Europe. The audacity of the scheme would have daunted anyone else. Instructed by the demagogue, John Wheble of the *Middlesex Journal* got himself arrested, as the royal proclamation had ordained, but it was the printer's own devil that arrested him, and he was brought to the Guildhall on a day when Wilkes happened to be the sitting magistrate. With mock gravity the alderman pronounced judgment, declaring that, as there

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 18, 20, 1771; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 81-4; cf. *History of Lynn*, W. Richards, ii. 946, 953-4; *Musgrave's Obituary*, iv. 212; MSS. of Major G. F. Molineux-Montgomerie, Garboldisham Old Hall, Norfolk.

<sup>2</sup> *Cavendish's Debates*, ii. pp. 311, 321; *History of England*, John Adolphus, i. 484-5.

was no reason to apprehend Mr. Wheble except for the offences alleged in the proclamation, he must be set at liberty, and that the man who had arrested him would be charged with assault and unlawful imprisonment. In order to emphasise his defiance of Parliament, Wilkes sent a letter to the Secretary of State, avowing that he had released the journalist, who was a freeman of London, because there was no "legal cause of complaint against him." And as a parting shot he sent the printer's devil to claim the reward of £50 offered by the Treasury for the apprehension of his master. At a single stroke he had declared war on behalf of the city against both Parliament and the King.<sup>1</sup>

On the same evening, John Miller of the *London Evening Post* brought one of the messengers of the House of Commons to the Mansion House in the custody of a constable, complaining that the said messenger had endeavoured to arrest him under the authority of a warrant from the Speaker. The incident having been expected, Miller had been rehearsed in his part by the same wily strategist who had instructed Wheble, and the disputants were brought immediately before Brass Crosby, the Lord Mayor, even though he was in bed with gout. Naturally, Wilkes was at his lordship's elbow, and Richard Oliver also had the good fortune to be present, so the three magistrates were jointly responsible for the plan of campaign. It lacked nothing in boldness. The Lord Mayor denied the authority of Parliament to apprehend a citizen of London, declaring the Speaker's warrant to be absolutely illegal, and in order to teach the House of Commons a salutary lesson he committed their messenger to prison for assault. It gave the Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms much trouble to get the man released on bail.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 16, 1771; *Chatham Correspondence*, iv. 115; *Walpole's Letters* (Toynbee), viii. 17; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 52-60; *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 108-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of J. Horne Tooke*, i. 337; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iv. 191; *Public Advertiser*, March 16, 18.

Smarting under a double affront, the punishment of their officer and the repudiation of their warrant, all parties in the House of Commons were agreed that an effort must be made to retain their dignity. A resolution was passed ordering the three magistrates to attend on the following day. Revelling in his sudden notoriety, the saturnine Oliver rose immediately in his place and acknowledged that he had helped to send the messenger to gaol. Swathed in flannels, for gout still racked his limbs, the invalid Crosby delivered an address upon the obligations of the mayoralty, being inspired by Wilkes in all his words and works, for, true to his bluff bulldog exterior, he was a swashbuckler and nothing more. In the end both offenders were sent to the Tower, where they remained for several weeks as prisoners of the House of Commons.

Since the Middlesex election no political event aroused so great a clamour. The citizens of London showed their approval of their magistrates with tempestuous enthusiasm. All the town rang with the cry of "Crosby, Wilkes, and Oliver, and the liberty of the Press." In a fierce riot in the streets of Westminster several members of Parliament were stoned and beaten. The Court of Common Council voted its thanks to the three aldermen. Huge mobs followed the Lord Mayor and his colleagues whenever they appeared in public, and escorted them in triumph to the Tower. A crowd of friends flocked to visit them in prison.

Although there was no irresolution in its dealings with Oliver and Crosby, the House of Commons did not venture upon another trial of strength with John Wilkes. Even George the Third took the precaution at an early date to tell Lord North that his enemy was "below the notice of the House." When he received the order commanding his attendance, Wilkes declined to obey the summons unless he were allowed "to attend in his place" as a member of Parliament, and after the injunction had been repeated twice the matter was allowed to rest. In a vain attempt



BRASS CROSBY

H. D.



to save itself from humiliation the House adopted the subterfuge of adjourning for the day on which it had summoned the demagogue to attend for the third time. *Mirabile dictu*, this policy was advised by the king, who protested that he would have "nothing more to do with that devil Wilkes."<sup>1</sup>

The victory of the popular party was a notable one. It was one of the greatest of Wilkes's numerous triumphs. Although Parson Horne, who thought himself the instigator of every ingenious manœuvre, claimed the strategy as his own, no one but the alderman of Farringdon Without could have brought it to a successful issue. Both Sawbridge and Townsend were daunted by the audacity of the plot, the latter suggesting that it was best to wait for "the protection of some great man." A mere device, perhaps, in its first inception to cause a quarrel between the city and the House of Commons, it proved to be the most conspicuous incident in the history of the freedom of the Press. Henceforth, with a few occasional interruptions, the newspapers were allowed to publish parliamentary debates, and the nation continued to enjoy the privilege of obtaining a daily report of the deliberations of its representatives. The silver cup, given to Wilkes by the corporation of London as a thank-offering for this great achievement, although a source of infinite raillery on the part of his enemies, was merited far more truly than any similar present.<sup>2</sup>

Of all his colleagues at this period one man especially seemed bound to Wilkes by infinite obligations. Owing to his association with the patriot, Richard Oliver had emerged from obscurity to become one of the most famous men of the day. It seemed a favourable moment to test his gratitude, and while he was in prison Wilkes made the

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Lord Rockingham*, ii. 205-6; *Chatham Correspondence*, iv. 123; *Correspondence of George III with Lord North*, i. 64; *Life of Wilkes*, P. Fitzgerald, ii. 166-86; *Public Advertiser*, March, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, April 1, 9, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 63-4.



request that he should become his colleague in the shrievalty for the ensuing year. To his great vexation Oliver refused peremptorily.

"I am determined not to serve the office of sheriff with you," he wrote from the Tower, "because I really do not think from your own declarations that your political aims are similar to mine."

It was easy to read between the lines. Being acquainted with Wilkes's methods of finance the writer believed that the patriot's colleague would be required to pay the expenses of both. Belonging also, like Townsend, to "the Malagrida crew," he was influenced by Lord Shelburne's attitude towards city politics. Under the influence of Parson Horne he was anxious to sever his connection with Wilkes altogether.<sup>1</sup>

A month later, the Brentford clergyman revealed to the world in a letter to the *Public Advertiser* that his former friend had become his bitterest foe. Putting forth all his power, and in language of the most virulent abuse, he did his utmost to damage Wilkes's character, the newspaper for the next two months being filled with his correspondence. Commencing by charging his enemy with stealing the clothes that he had left in his care at Paris—the uncanonical suits of scarlet and gold and white and silver—he repeated all the ancient innuendoes of the past ten years. Once more Wilkes was accused of embezzling the funds of the Foundling Hospital, of committing a breach of trust towards the Buckinghamshire militia, of cheating Silva, the Jew, and swindling the French jewellers. Each debt and each extravagance was specified and exaggerated with unscrupulous malice. The rent of his house was divulged and the number of his servants. In all manner of ways he was pilloried as a spendthrift and a profligate.

Wilkes strove to palliate every attack, returning blow for blow in fierce earnest. Being on the defensive his

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,871, ff. 74-5; *Public Advertiser*, April 13, 16, 1771.



RICHARD OLIVER

*1961; drawn by W. Dickinson of the portrait painted in the Tower by R. Pine*



letters were not disfigured by the same irrelevant personalities as those of his foe. Keeping his temper under better control his wit occasionally sparkles brightly. Aware that the sympathies of the public were on his side it was easier for him to make some show of dignity. It was acknowledged too by most that he defeated his antagonist, emerging from the paper warfare more popular with the masses than ever, little out of favour also with the better folk, who had known the worst of him long ago. The British public on the whole, with its innate love of fair play, was shocked by the style of the controversy, being of the opinion that Horne was hitting below the belt all the time. In the end Wilkes suffered little harm from the affray. Whenever he lost a valuable adherent he could always find another to supply his place.<sup>1</sup>

The chief result of the quarrel between Wilkes and Horne was a great schism among the Supporters of the Bill of Rights. A number of the leaders, including Sawbridge, Oliver, and Townsend, resigned their membership, and assisted the revengeful cleric to found a rival club under the title of the Constitutional Society. It was a grievous blow to the parent association, but Churchill, Mawbey, and Dr. Wilson remained firm in their allegiance and piloted it through the storm. Bulldog Crosby, also, who had married in succession three wealthy widows, was a source of great financial strength, attaching himself to Wilkes with canine fidelity, always ready to growl or to frolic as his master bade him.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the machinations of the Shelburne faction Wilkes and Wilkes's nominee were chosen sheriffs by a decisive majority. By making frantic efforts to secure his defeat, the Government also did him the utmost service, its interference causing many of the voters to pass over

<sup>1</sup> *Controversial Letters of Wilkes and Horne ; Life of J. Horne Tooke*, A. Stephens, i. 176-319 ; *The Public Advertiser*, May and June, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, iii. 221, 276 ; *Lady's Magazine* (1771), pp. 428, 476 ; *Public Advertiser*, April 11, 18, 1771.

to his side. Richard Oliver, diminutive and refined, was his principal opponent, too lacking in vigour to make a popular candidate, being handicapped moreover by having "a ministerial alderman" as his colleague. It was futile to pit him against the formidable demagogue, and before the books were opened it was evident that he would be at the bottom of the poll. In the choice of a fellow candidate Wilkes had been favoured by his usual good fortune, discovering a rich and docile tea-dealer named Frederick Bull, who was eager to serve with him as sheriff whatever the cost.<sup>1</sup>

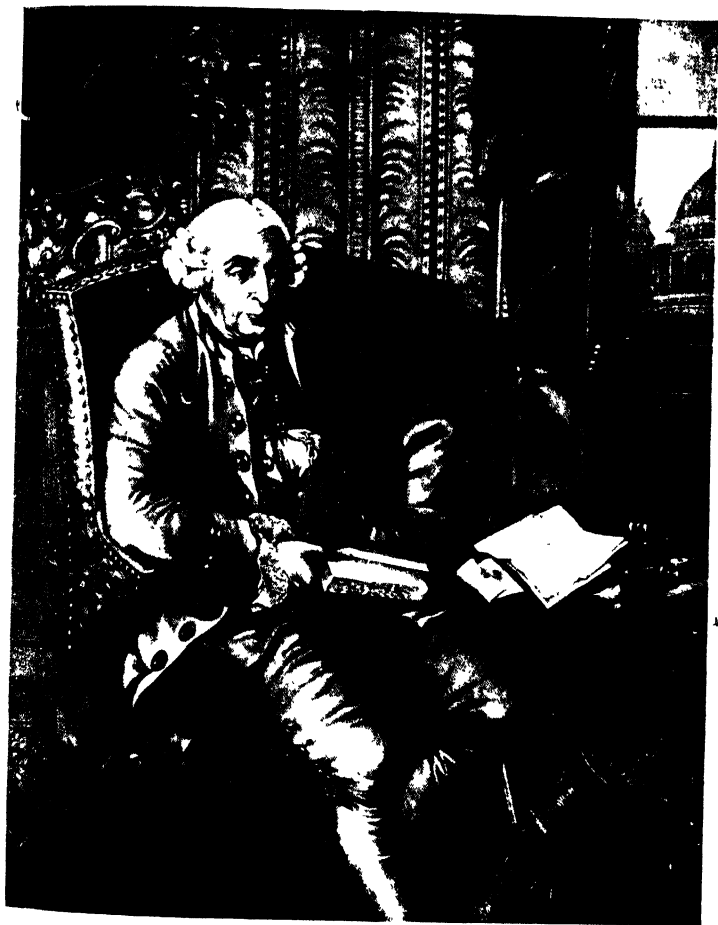
The result of the election was a great triumph for Wilkes, as the defeat of his colleague had been regarded as certain. Henceforth, the influence of Parson Horne vanished from the city altogether. A short time afterwards the clergyman is said to have sent a challenge to his enemy.

"Sir," wrote Wilkes in reply, "I do not think it my business to cut the throat of every desperado that may be tired of his life; but as I am at present High Sheriff of the City of London it may shortly happen that I may have an opportunity of attending you in my civil capacity, in which case I will answer for it that you shall have *no ground* to complain of my endeavours to serve you."<sup>2</sup>

On the 21st of August the most amazing letter that Wilkes had ever received was brought to Prince's Court by an Irish chairman, who said that it had been given to him by a gentleman in the Strand. It bore the awful signature of "Junius," and was written by the Great Unknown, whose fulminations in *The Public Advertiser*, reviling the highest in the land with a malice and ferocity unparalleled before, had made him the most famous poli-

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, June 25 to July 2, 1771; *Letters of Junius* (Bohn, 1910), i. 357-8; *Letters of David Hume to W. Strahan*, p. 211; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iv. 217; *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, lii. 121.

<sup>2</sup> *Old and New London*, E. Walford, i. 410.



*W. A. M.*

FREDERICK BULL

*R. L. M. sculpt*



tical controversialist of the age. For Wilkes especially these letters had a curious interest, since public opinion had persisted in regarding him as their author until the disdainful references to himself made it clear that they were not written by his pen. Even had he possessed sufficient restraint to transform his style into the polished invective of Junius, the true Wilkes buffoonery must have betrayed itself here and there. The calligraphy of the famous essays also bore no resemblance to his neat irregular handwriting.

The letter to the sheriff was an appeal to him to use his influence to repair "the late unhappy divisions in the city." Having been a strenuous advocate of the popular cause in the Middlesex election, Junius was conscious, no doubt, that the demagogue would listen to him with respect. The panacea that he proposed was a reconciliation between Wilkes and Sawbridge, a most ingenious suggestion, for the squire of Olantighe was the least tractable of Horne's followers, and his desertion would have been a deadly blow to the enemy. Deaf to all advice when his resolution was formed, Wilkes declined to make overtures to any of his opponents, having already arranged his plan of campaign against the Olivers and the Townsends. But he wrote a civil answer to his distinguished counsellor, giving many reasons for his refusal. A long correspondence ensued between the pair, in which Junius sketched a political programme for the City of London and drew up a set of "resolutions" for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights. Wilkes listened with respect to his mentor, flattered by his attention though seldom following his precepts. With a touch of humour, unconscious probably in this case, he offered a ticket for the Lord Mayor's Ball to the Great Unknown, promising the hand of his daughter for the night. "How happy should I be to see my Portia here dance a graceful minuet with Junius Brutus!" The other, however, was not disposed to trust Jack Wilkes with his



secret. "My age and figure," he replied, "would do but little credit to my partner."<sup>1</sup>

The duties of sheriff soon caused Wilkes to take his place in one of the grim processions to Tyburn. On this occasion five poor convicts were carried to the gallows, four men and a woman. She rode in the second tumbril along with a penitent psalm-singing thief, a beautiful girl with a wealth of golden hair, condemned to die for stealing a few yards of stuff from a shop in Ludgate Hill. It was a pitiful case. A press-gang had carried off her husband, and she had committed the crime to buy food for her two babies. Although a very large number of thieves had been tried at the last sessions and tradesmen were clamouring for severity, the youth and beauty of Mary Jones might have touched the hearts of her judges but for her conduct in the dock. Upon hearing the verdict she turned in fury upon the bench, her hot Irish blood flaming with passion. "God blast ye, you old foggrums!" she had cried. So there was no recommendation to mercy, and she was taken by the sheriffs to be hanged.

A great concourse lined the route, attracted by the presence of the popular idol. Dressed in a mourning frock coat with a black sword, he rode in his colleague's splendid carriage behind the open cart where sat the unhappy girl. Hundreds, who might have felt pity for her at another time, had thoughts for no one else but Sheriff Wilkes. Nor did she gain more sympathy than the other criminals at the fatal tree. The penitent thief, who made "a dying speech" to the crowd, and a blasphemous sailor, who struggled with the hangman, were of far greater interest to most of the spectators. Yet, five years later, the whole nation was stirred by the remembrance of her sad fate. In a burst of fervid eloquence Sir William Meredith told her piteous tale to the House of Commons, using many an exaggeration, but painting the tragedy in no more hideous

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Junius* (Bohn, 1910), ii. 63-107.

colours than it deserved. And from that time onward no story in the Newgate Calendar has drawn forth more tears.<sup>1</sup>

A pretty Mrs. Gardiner was present at the spectacle, Wilkes's latest mistress, with whom he had been carrying on a clandestine amour with the aid of her sister under the nose of a jealous protector. "How do you do after the dismal scene this morning," she wrote to him the same evening. "It was the first my eyes ever beheld and it will be the last." Some of the newspapers made merry over Wilkes's appearance at an execution in an official capacity. "It is reported," said the correspondent of the *Public Advertiser*, "that one of the malefactors, while exhorting the populace to take warning by his untimely end, pointed his address in a very particular manner towards a certain gentleman who presided at this fatal ceremony, whose unconscious blush, it was observed, betrayed some glimmerings of grace, and gave hopes that he might possibly avail himself of so solemn an admonition."<sup>2</sup>

True to his reputation, Wilkes began his term of office with a bid for popular applause. In a letter to Mr. Akerman, the governor of Newgate, he announced that the galleries at the Old Bailey would be flung open to the public, all the extravagant fees previously charged for admission being abolished. The new regulations were hailed with delight by the criminal classes. At the next sessions the courthouse was besieged by a ragged mob, who fought tooth and nail to gain possession of the privileged places. All day long disorder reigned both inside and outside the building, the judges finding the utmost difficulty in transacting their business. From time to time the City Marshal and

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Sept. 13, 16, Oct. 17, 18, 1771; *Middlesex Journal*, Sept. 14-17, Oct. 15-17, 1771; *General Evening Post*, Oct. 15-17, 17-19, 1771; *Parliamentary History*, xix. 237-8; *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, iv. 414; *Session Papers*, xlvii. p. 418, Guildhall Library; *History of Tyburn Tree*, A. Marks, pp. 255-8.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,875, f. 132; *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 17, 1771.

the Under-Sheriff were compelled to eject some of the disturbers in the gallery. Mr. Justice Gould declared from the bench that he had never seen "so much irregularity" in a court of justice in his life. Perceiving that he had made a mistake, Wilkes was far too shrewd to repeat it. Before the next "gaol delivery" he had modified his plans, and the public ceased to be admitted indiscriminately into the Session House. With a clever attempt to palliate his error he protested that Horne and his friends had hired the mob that had caused all the trouble.<sup>1</sup>

During the Christmas vacation Wilkes spent a few days at Bath, which he was in the habit of visiting more often than any other place at this period of his life. Always fond of travel, he made a short tour in the country several times a year, entering the details of his journey in his diary, noting the inns where he stayed and the distance between each posting house.<sup>2</sup> On the present occasion he was accompanied by the docile Bull, who performed, no doubt, the duties of paymaster, both lodging with a Mrs. Harford in the last house on the South Parade towards the river. Another of his city satellites joined the party, a foppish and briefless barrister of considerable wealth, named Watkin Lewis, who had fixed his grip upon the sheriff's coat-tails in the expectation of being dragged into fame.

The chief event of the visit was a journey to Bristol, where Wilkes received a royal welcome from the people, and was entertained at a public banquet in Merchant Taylors' Hall. Yet the incident that seemed to please him most was an introduction to the pretty daughters of Thomas Linley, whom he met at the house of Major William Brereton in Garrard Street.<sup>3</sup> For Elizabeth Linley, who soon afterwards

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1771), p. 471; *Town and Country Magazine*, iii. 557; *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 24, 26, Nov. 30, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 50,866; cf. "John Wilkes and his Visits to Bath," Emanuel Green, in *Proceedings of the Bath Natural History Club*, x. 375.

<sup>3</sup> Garrard Street is now Somerset Street. Major William Brereton was Master of Ceremonies in 1777.

became the wife of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, he had an unbounded admiration.

"The eldest I think still superior to all the handsome things I have heard of her," he wrote to Miss Wilkes two days later. "She does not seem in the least spoilt by the idle talk of our sex; and is the most modest, pleasing, delicate flower I have seen for a great while."

With Mary Linley, who afterwards married Richard Tickell, he was less satisfied, calling her "a mere coquet, a man's jou jou, no sentiment."<sup>1</sup> Whenever the fastidious Wilkes eulogised beauty the rest of the world was certain to endorse his opinion.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 97-8.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LORD MAYOR OF LONDON

1772-1775

**D**URING the next four years Wilkes was the most conspicuous figure in the turbulent arena of city politics. Two powerful factions were arrayed against him all the while, disputing his progress step by step, the mercantile adherents of the Government and the party of Oliver and Townsend. The battle was a desperate one, fluctuating violently from side to side, and though often worsted for the moment he always triumphed in the end. In a measure perhaps the odds were equally divided, the majority of the Liverymen being in his favour but the brains and wealth of the corporation were against him. Often betrayed by the treachery or the cowardice of his friends he trusted no one, 'practically conducting the contest single-handed. It was a feat of statesmanship of no common order, this municipal campaign of John Wilkes, in which none but a man of his cunning and finesse would have been able to succeed. A book might be written for the student of political tactics, tracing the inner history of Guildhall during the ascendancy of the popular hero, showing his almost superhuman sagacity in the anticipation of events and the management of men.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his habit of playing to the gallery, Wilkes proved an excellent sheriff. He introduced numerous reforms, most of which were necessary and judicious. A new

<sup>1</sup> To a great extent this has been done in *London and the Kingdom* by R. R. Sharpe, vol. iii. Space alone has prevented Dr. Sharpe from giving an exhaustive account of Wilkes's manoeuvres.

"Freeholders' Book" being required, containing an accurate list of the electors, he caused one to be compiled.<sup>1</sup> Accompanied by his colleague he made periodical visits to the various gaols in order to see for himself that the prisoners were treated with humanity.<sup>2</sup> Fresh regulations were issued to prevent the bailiff from treating the debtor with injustice, and one of them was discharged as an example to the rest for disobeying these injunctions.<sup>3</sup> The infamous Bolland, who had used his position as sheriff's officer to levy blackmail, was detected by the vigilance of his new master, and met a merited fate on Tyburn tree.<sup>4</sup> On occasion, Wilkes was willing to spend the whole night in helping the salvage men to extinguish a fire.<sup>5</sup> At the close of his term of office he received a unanimous vote of thanks from the Livery.<sup>6</sup>

While he was sheriff Wilkes would allow no French wine to be served at dinner in the Old Bailey, and made an ineffectual attempt to persuade Lord Mayor Nash to adopt a similar rule at the entertainments in the Mansion House.<sup>7</sup> There was a special motive for the proscription, since his enemies persisted in spreading the rumour that he was in the pay of France. The scandal probably owed its origin to his friendship with the Chevalier d'Eon, it being alleged that the French minister could raise a riot in London during the stormy days of the Middlesex election whenever he chose to order one. During his shrievalty Wilkes was accused frequently of visiting the French Ambassador, the innuendo implying that he called to receive the wages paid

<sup>1</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, iv. 52; *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 27, 1771; Jan. 8, 1772.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 21, 1771.

<sup>3</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, iii. 613; *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 26, 1772.

<sup>4</sup> *Account of James Bolland* (1772), p. 15; *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 2, 16, 1771; March 25, May 9, 1772; *The Newgate Calendar*.

<sup>5</sup> *Annual Register* (1772), 111; *Public Advertiser*, June 29, 1772.

<sup>6</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1772), pp. 489.

<sup>7</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1771), p. 471.

to him for causing dissension between the city and the Government.<sup>1</sup> The charge was never proved. Even if it had been, Wilkes no doubt would have managed to palliate it. Probably he would have contended that no one had ever been able to influence his conduct either by bribes or by threats, and that he was doing a smart and a patriotic act in extorting levies from the pockets of an unfriendly nation.

John Reynolds, the pugilistic attorney, managed to secure the position of under-sheriff during his employer's term of office. Owing to his sense of humour he continued high in Wilkes's favour, although a negligent man of business. Enemies declared with some reason that he was ignorant and vulgar and "spoke bad grammar"; but he was ever ready to roar with laughter at his patron's jests, and could always spare the time to take him for a day's holiday to his country house at Bromley, where the sheriff forgot all his anxieties in the charming society of Mrs. Reynolds and her sister.<sup>2</sup> It proved a most unfortunate connection, terminating eventually in the lawyer's bankruptcy. It was Wilkes's fate invariably to be badly served by those he trusted, being, in spite of all his shrewdness, absolutely without discretion when choosing a subordinate.

During his shrievalty and for many years afterwards, the Supporters of the Bill of Rights continued to pay his debts and provide him with an annuity. With happy tact, shortly after the great schism, he had persuaded the society to "take into consideration the state of his affairs," declaring at the same time that he had no claim upon them.<sup>3</sup> The docile and opulent Bull was proud to act as treasurer,

<sup>1</sup> *History of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, iii. 138; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 321; *Walpoliana*, J. Pinkerton, i. 2; *Mémoires sur La Chevalière D'Eon*, F. Gaillardet, p. 186; *D'Eon de Beaumont*, O. Homberg and F. Jousselin, p. 130; Add. MS. 35,368, f. 310; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 177; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1771), 566; *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 6, 17, 1771.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds*, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, iv. 109.

while Brass Crosby and Watkin Lewis contended with each other for the chair. Although the contributions of the faithful flowed in a less copious stream, the principal members of the club could afford to make up the deficiency. Dr. Wilson and Sir Joseph Mawbey were wealthy men, and Humphrey Cotes, who remained a devoted slave, was always ready to convass for the benefit of his leaders. Many of the Whig magnates, including Lord Rockingham and the Dukes of Portland and Devonshire, contributed an annual sum of £100 for Wilkes's benefit.<sup>1</sup> An occasional legacy swelled the balance-sheet. And though his income was considerable, he supplemented it largely by credit.

At the next election he stood for the mayoralty. In order to prevent the return of a "ministerial alderman," James Townsend was chosen as the other popular candidate, Lord Shelburne's influence in the city being in a large measure responsible for his selection.<sup>2</sup> Having proclaimed publicly in his dispute with Oliver that "it was the duty of every gentleman to submit to the Livery the choice of his colleague," Wilkes could make no objection, although the enmity between Townsend and himself was more bitter than ever. In the Court of Common Council they had accused one another respectively of committing perjury and uttering falsehoods, and everyone believed that sooner or later a duel must take place. Wilkes headed the poll, as all had expected, followed closely by his enemy, who received only twenty-three votes less, and though their opponents demanded a scrutiny the election was confirmed. During the contest Townsend disdained to appear on the hustings, proclaiming ostentatiously that he had "gone shooting." When the two leaders were submitted as usual for the final choice of the Court of Aldermen the craftiness of Richard Oliver, who

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Lord Rockingham*, ii. 236.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Lord Shelburne*, E. Fitzmaurice, ii. 287; *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 133.



was now one of the sheriffs, secured the selection of his friend. By making the return while the Wilkites were unprepared, a majority of the aldermen "scratched" for Townsend, who accordingly became Lord Mayor. A great outcry arose, a real and spontaneous outburst of popular indignation, and Wilkes himself, for once in his life, lost his temper also.<sup>1</sup>

While her father was absorbed in municipal affairs the beloved Polly had been paying a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Crisp Molineux at Garboldisham in Norfolk. In the pretty country house, with its old-world garden and wealth of stately trees, she was always a welcome guest, the lady of the manor remaining her devoted friend to the close of her life. But Garboldisham Old Hall soon ceased to be the happy home that Miss Wilkes found it in the autumn of the year. Husband and wife, through incompatibility of temper, began to live much of their lives apart. Mrs. Molineux, the spoilt child of an indulgent father, found it impossible to tolerate the careless habits of old Crisp, upon whose manners and character a long residence in the West Indies had left an indelible stamp. On his part, the genial planter was quick to perceive that the handsome heiress whom he had married was neurotic and invertebrate.

Upon the four children, all special pets of Miss Wilkes, the estrangement of the parents cast the inevitable gloom. George, the only boy, often was condemned to spend his holidays at school, and Peggy and Betsy, the two younger daughters, who seem to have been Mr. Molineux's favourites, were kept away from their mother as much as possible. In writing to her father Miss Wilkes referred affectionately to Mrs. Molineux as "the widow," and her sympathies were always on her side. The patriot and his daughter never ceased to be on the most friendly terms with the

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Reign of George the Third*, H. Walpole, i. 163-4; *Letters of Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Montagu*, ii. 174; *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 1-31, 1772.



THE MISSES MOLINEUX

*These pictures are the possession of Major Montgomery of Antioch, the "Old Stone Old Man"*



unlucky lady, who managed to remain gay and sprightly in spite of her tribulations, and they often talked with pity about her "distracted family." In the three Miss Molineux also Wilkes took a fatherly interest, for they grew up to be very pretty girls.<sup>1</sup>

During the latter half of the eighteenth century no Lord Mayor of London experienced a more turbulent year of office than James Townsend. A great manifestation of popular anger occurred a few days after his election, the people being indignant that he had been chosen instead of his colleague. As the Lord Mayor's procession was making its way to Westminster it was stopped by the mob, who attempted to turn back Townsend's coach, crying that "Wilkes must go first," and the windows of most of the carriages were broken by stones. In the evening, while the mayoral ball was in progress, a riotous multitude surrounded Guildhall, breaking lamps, extinguishing lights, and probably would have invaded the building had they not been dispersed by the militia. Alderman Townsend, no less brave than irascible, was delighted by these disturbances, and endeavoured to malign his enemy by accusing Wilkes and his friends of "hiring the mobs" to attack him. Having absented himself from "the Lord Mayor's Show," lest his presence might provoke a riot, Wilkes was able to refute the imputation, and declared that the disorder could have been suppressed at once had not Sheriff Oliver been a coward. It was his good fortune invariably to be accused of offences that his antagonists were unable to prove.<sup>2</sup>

With implacable virulence, but without losing his temper, Wilkes continued to revile his antagonist incessantly, insulting him in the council chamber, lampooning him in

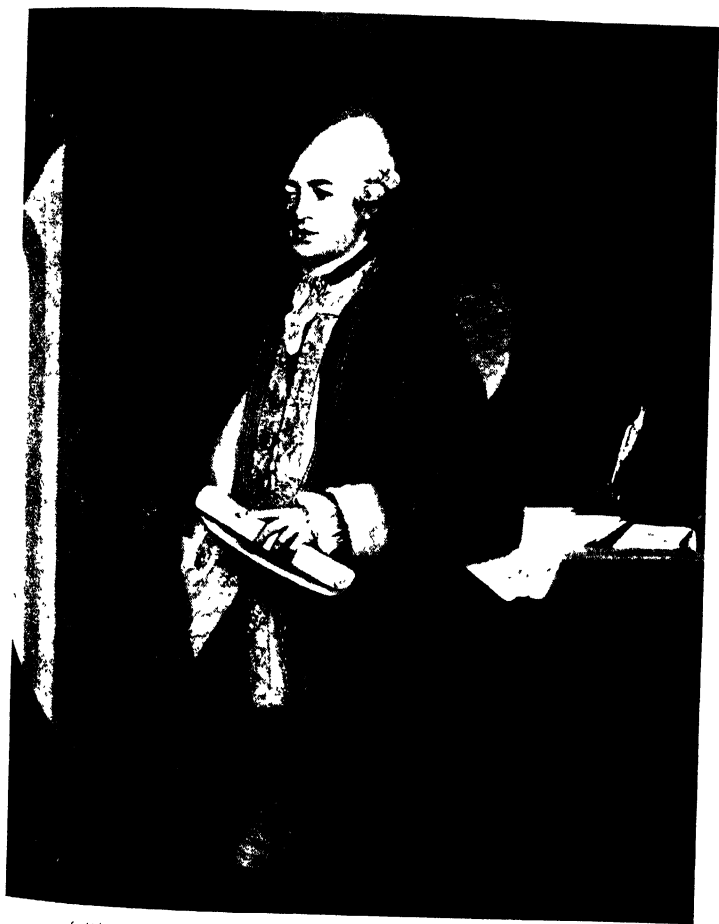
<sup>1</sup> MSS. of Major G. F. Molineux-Montgomerie of Garboldisham; Wilkes MSS. *passim*; Will of Crisp Molineux, P.C.C. Dodwell, p. 273; Musgrave's *Obituary*, iv. 212-13.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 164; *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 10, 13, 1772; *London Magazine* (1772), 549.

anonymous paragraphs in the newspapers. Fond of contention as he was, and though he met every onslaught unflinchingly, it was not long before Townsend would have welcomed a treaty of peace, constant innuendoes extinguishing the last remnants of his popularity. The charge that he was not in sympathy with the demand for shorter parliaments brought him much odium ; the accusation that he had flogged two children for trespassing on his land aroused an angry clamour against him. Nor would Wilkes allow the people to forget that their Lord Mayor was attached to the Shelburne faction, the taunt of " Malagrida " being always on his lips. He told his enemy to his face that he was a liar and a brutal tyrant, adding significantly that he himself had " a hand and a sword." Yet though renowned for his bad temper, Townsend would not be provoked to a duel.<sup>1</sup>

A typical instance of the cunning tactics with which the demagogue harassed his rival occurred when the City of London presented a fresh Remonstrance to the Crown. Wilkes himself refused to accompany the deputation to St. James's, alleging with unwonted delicacy that as he was " personally obnoxious to the King " it would be " rude and indecent to force himself into the Royal Presence," and suggesting very truly that his appearance might cause a riot. Having thus made his own peace with the populace, he proceeded to place Townsend in an unpleasant dilemma. When the Remonstrance was being composed he insisted that it should be drafted in the most strong and vehement language, boasting that the Lord Mayor would be arraigned for treason if he presented it and stoned by the people if he did not. By hesitancy Townsend augmented his embarrassments, for he sought the opinion of Thurlow as well as Glynn, hoping to conciliate both Whig and Tory, and, being finally compelled to accompany the Remonstrance

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 16, Dec. 4, 1772 ; Feb. 22, 1773 ; *Middlesex Journal*, Feb. 20-23, 1773.



1750

SIR WATKIN LEWIS

*H. P. Lewis*



to the palace, he whispered to the Lord Chamberlain that "he was only acting officially."<sup>1</sup>

While enjoying his tit-for-tat with his rival, Wilkes took care that the bitter memory of the Middlesex election should not fade from the public mind, prompting Savile to move an annual motion, which received the desultory support of the Opposition. Soon after the presentation of the Remonstrance he found a better opportunity still of advertising his claims. A call of the House of Commons being moved by the Prime Minister, the sheriffs received notice to summon the various representatives of the counties and boroughs, and Oliver and Lewis, who were now in office, ignored Colonel Luttrell and instructed Wilkes to attend as member for Middlesex. Having written to the Speaker, asserting his right to his seat, the demagogue demanded his certificate at the Crown Office, and, being refused, he marched to St. Stephen's, where he demanded that he should be allowed to take the oath. Although his application was ignored, the Government did not venture to punish him for contempt. The occasion also gave him another chance of vituperating the Shelburne faction, for he insinuated that Oliver had wished to send the summons to Colonel Luttrell, being dissuaded with difficulty by the protests of Watkin Lewis.<sup>2</sup>

At the next election Wilkes made another bid for the Mayoralty, choosing Frederick Bull as his colleague. Being assured that his nominee and himself would head the poll, he knew that the court of Aldermen must select one of them. In this manner he foresaw that it was possible for him to appoint the Lord Mayor every year.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 188, 190; *Life of Lord Shelburne*, E. Fitzmaurice, ii. 291; *Middlesex Journal*, March 9-11, 18-20, 1773; *Public Advertiser*, March 9, 16, 20, 26, 27, 29, 30; April 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 1773.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence of R. M. Keith*, i. 339-40; *Letters of George the Third to Lord North*, i. 131; *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxiv. 279-283; *Annual Register* (1773), pp. 190-5; *Public Advertiser*, April 7-29, 1773.



"I am happy, gentlemen," he had boasted to the Livery twelve months previously, "to be farther useful to you by humbly offering to you, at all future times, the tender of my services, in conjunction with any gentleman whom you many choose hereafter to raise to the dignity of your Chief Magistrate. I shall thus enjoy the satisfaction of vesting in the Livery of London the full and sole power of electing their own mayor, a privilege enjoyed by all other corporations."<sup>1</sup>

It was an ultimatum both to the "court party" and the "Malagrida gang," a threat practically to ostracise them until they should allow him to become Lord Mayor.

Undaunted by the tribulations of Townsend, the Shelburne faction made another effort to thwart their antagonist, putting up Sawbridge, their strongest candidate, in conjunction with Oliver. At a Common Hall on the day of election he accused Wilkes from the hustings of slandering him in anonymous paragraphs, which elicited a "spirited reply" from the patriot, who, being ever on the watch to alienate Sawbridge from his party, took the opportunity of praising him highly as "a private man." From the opening of the poll it was obvious that Wilkes would gain a splendid victory, and his majority exceeded expectations. Nearly 1700 votes were given to him, Bull receiving only 35 fewer, but Sawbridge totalled less than 1200, and Oliver came last with 1094. Outside Guildhall a delighted mob shouted for "Wilkes and Liberty," and when the conqueror appeared he was drawn in triumph through the streets. A couple of days later, when the two names were submitted to the court, an equal number of aldermen "scratched" for each, but Bull was chosen Lord Mayor by the casting vote of Townsend.<sup>2</sup> Wilkes, nevertheless, was quite content, for, since his docile nominee was entirely under his thumb, he could look forward to dictating the policy of the Mansion

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Sept. 24, 1773.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Sept. 30; Oct. 9, 1773; *Middlesex Journal*, Sept. 30-Oct. 9.

House as thoroughly as though he had worn the chain of office.

In the course of the next spring his natural son, Jack Smith, came back from France, where he had been living for four years. Being attached to the "lively little rogue," Wilkes had taken much interest in his education, sending him first to Harrow and then transplanting him to the academy of Monsieur Lauchoux in Paris. It was an original plan, the lad being now only thirteen, and the result was peculiar; for Master Jack arrived in London, a French boy in taste, manner, and appearance, having also nearly forgotten his own language. Much perturbed, for as he had tabooed French wine it was inconsistent to have a French son, Wilkes placed him under the care of the famous Angelo, hoping that he would lose his Parisian habits in the gymnasium and the riding-school. At the same time he made up his mind to send him to Germany for a year or two, in case the first antidote failed to take effect.<sup>1</sup>

In August Wilkes was ill for nearly three weeks at Prince's Court suffering from ague, the only malady that ever troubled him. The complaint, however, was apt to return at frequent intervals, and the fever was often obstinate and distressing, requiring bark and James's Powder in large quantities before he could find relief. Always a patient invalid, he never disobeyed the doctor's orders, keeping his bed until convalescent, or sitting in the cosy parlour, decorated with prints after Hogarth, overlooking Birdcage Walk. On the present occasion the attack proved a severe one, causing much commotion both to friend and foe, but his fine constitution was as vigorous as ever, and the illness never became dangerous. When able to travel he paid a short visit to Eastbourne and Brighton.<sup>2</sup>

He was back in London early in September in order to

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Isle of Wight*, W. H. Davenport Adams, p. 203; *Reminiscences of H. Angelo*, i. 41; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes's diary, Add. MSS. 30,866.

make his plans for the election of the new Lord Mayor. Once again he chose his former colleague—a threat to the Court of Aldermen that they would have to elect Alderman Bull for all time unless they would consent to accept Alderman Wilkes. The Townsend faction were unable to find anyone to oppose him, Sawbridge having been conciliated at last by their wily foe, and they were obliged to give their support to the “court candidates,” Esdaile and Kennett. As usual the poll was open for six days, from the 30th of September to the 6th of October, 1774, and at its close, Wilkes, who received thirty-four more votes than his associate, had beaten the nearest of his opponents by a majority of almost five hundred.

On the following morning, when the election was to be decided, Guildhall and the adjacent streets were filled by as resolute and exultant a multitude as ever assembled beneath the banner of John Wilkes. Few doubted the final result, and it was significant that no preparations had been made to suppress a riot. On the hustings, within the historic building, all the prominent “patriots” were present with radiant faces, and Sergeant Glynn, “though emaciated and eat up with gout and quite unable to stand,” was carried to his seat by two men, determined at any hazard to take part in the triumph of his old comrade. Shortly after twelve o’clock, when the Common Sergeant had declared the state of the poll, the sheriffs departed to submit the names of the two leaders to the Court of Aldermen. Half an hour later the Lord Mayor and his retinue filed slowly on to the platform. A signal being given to the decrepit Glynn, whose duty it was as Recorder of London to announce the result of the Livery, he hobbled to his feet, aided by his two bearers. Before he had spoken a word the vast assembly had guessed the tidings he had to tell them, and as he declared that “the election had fallen on John Wilkes,” his voice was drowned by the most mighty shout that had ever resounded within the old

hall.<sup>1</sup> A moment later the applause was swelled by ten thousand throats from without, the bells from all the neighbouring steeples joining in the pæan of joy.

In the eyes of the superstitious there was one incident to mar the pleasure of the occasion. While the chain was being placed over the head of the new Lord Mayor, according to custom in the presence of the whole Livery, the links became unfastened and it fell upon the floor. Wilkes, however, was no believer in such portents of ill-luck. Flushed with triumph, he advanced to the front of the hustings, delivering the usual speech, thanking the electors for the honour they had paid him, with vigour and earnestness. "It is the greatest honour," he declared in his hoarse, harsh voice, "that you could confer or I receive, and you may depend upon it, as you have chosen me for the guardian of your rights and liberties, I shall always be ready to defend the franchise of this city and the liberties of the people in general. I do promise always to be ready to meet you in Common Hall or Common Council whenever called upon for that purpose, that we may confer together for the great purpose of preserving the constitution of this commercial city." Outside Guildhall the people had waited with patience and good humour all the morning to welcome their champion. No sooner was he seated in his coach than the horses were taken from the shafts and he was dragged in triumph to the Mansion House. In the scuffle for the honour of drawing him through the streets one of his admirers lost his life.<sup>2</sup>

In one particular the ensuing Lord Mayor's Show was the most notable that had taken place hitherto. Never before had so great a concourse witnessed the spectacle.

<sup>1</sup> Only three of the aldermen voted against Wilkes—Oliver, Townsend, and another.

<sup>2</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, Sept. 29–Oct. 8, 1774; *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 10 and 11, 1774; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1774), p. 491; *Town and Country Magazine*, vi. 555; *Lady's Magazine* (1774), pp. 555–6; *London Magazine*, xliii. 507; *Journal of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 420–1.

From the "Three Crane" stairs at Queenhithe, where the flotilla of stately barges began its journey, the water was covered with boats as far as Westminster, each filled with a little crowd of holiday-makers. "They formed one surface of wood," a journalist declared, "and looked like a temporary bridge." On both sides of the river the banks were lined with jubilant spectators. It was a common remark that the number of ladies in the windows and balconies was larger than on any previous occasion. There was no reason for the demagogue to complain of the zeal of his fellow-citizens.

Of all the London pageants none was more splendid or picturesque than this annual procession up the Thames when the Lord Mayor went to take the oaths in the Court of Exchequer. Modern progress, alas, has substituted a conventional drive through the streets. A master of pageantry, Wilkes took advantage of the opportunity to display the resources of the city in full panoply. Seldom had the state barge made a braver show of pendants and streamers. The barge of every city company followed in his train, bright with new paint and gilding. Never had his lordship's footmen appeared more magnificent in their new liveries of blue and crimson. Every councillor and every official, entitled to wear a robe, was pressed into service to swell the triumph.

On the return journey, when the Lord Mayor disembarked as usual at Blackfriars Stairs, so tumultuous was his welcome that he deemed it needful to make a short speech to the excited crowds, advising "decorum." Preceded by the Joiners' Company, to which he belonged, and the Salters' Company, out of compliment to Alderman Bull, with the "city music" playing popular airs, and the militia as his escort (for he would not hire the artillery to walk in his pageant since they had always voted against him), the procession began its march through the streets, moving slowly and with labour, as the horses of the state coach,

frightened by the acclamations, were difficult to control. At every step of the journey Wilkes was received with the wildest enthusiasm. The City of London had never given such a magnificent ovation to any man. In spite of the sneers of his enemies his popularity was greater than ever it had been before.

Yet there was much bitterness in the cup for which he had fought so greedily. At the Lord Mayor's dinner in Guildhall, when the Show was over, numbers of those who had been bidden would not deign to attend the feast. Usually the most illustrious in the land were eager guests, but on the present occasion the nobility for the most part refused the invitation. At the ball, too, which followed the banquet there were few of the high-born women whose presence usually made the assembly so brilliant. Illness, moreover, seized him just as he was sitting down to table. The day had been a most arduous one, for he had commenced his progress to Westminster at twelve o'clock in the morning and did not reach the Guildhall again till nearly five, being exposed, during the greater part of the time, to the inclemency of the raw November air. Although he managed to perform his duties both at the dinner and the dance, it was evident that he was in the grip of fever. On his return to Prince's Court that evening—for the apartments at the Mansion House were not yet ready for him—the indisposition proved to be an attack of ague, and he was unable to leave the house for seven days.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of Wilkes's accession to the mayoralty the country was in the turmoil of a general election. Fourteen days later, amidst tipsy cheers and the booming of cannon, he had been returned once more as member for Middlesex along with Serjeant Glynn, no one venturing to do battle against him. The scene at the hustings at Brentford Butts

<sup>1</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, Nov. 10, 1774; *London Magazine* (1774), pp. 515-16, 560; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1774), p. 538; cf. *History of London*, J. Entick, iii. 305-7; *History of London*, B. Lambert, iii. 209-10; *Lord Mayor's Pageants*, F. W. Fairholt, i. 143-4.

was a typical one, the patriots making a fine display of equipages and cavalcades of horsemen, banners streaming, music playing, and an unsavoury crowd, filled with free beer, jostling and cheering in front of the bedizened platform. From an open window in a neighbouring house Wilkes's termagant sister, Mrs. Hayley, smiled approval upon the freeholders. As soon as they could manage to escape, the two knights of the Shire set off in a coach and six belonging to Alderman Bull and drove over Kew Bridge to the "Star and Garter" at Richmond, where they sat down to a festive dinner with some congenial friends.

Aspiring to lead a faction of his own in the House of Commons, like Shelburne or Rockingham, Wilkes had issued a manifesto, soon after the dissolution, that all who wished to fight under his flag were required to endorse. It was one of the first examples of the familiar "programme," with which a political party in modern days woos the favour of the proletariat at the time of a general election. In substance it was calculated to satisfy the most progressive of the patriots. Commencing with a pledge to support the form of Government established at the Revolution, it advocated shorter Parliaments and a more fair and equal representation of the people, demanding also that the American colonists should be conciliated by favourable legislation. Every candidate who disapproved of these principles was opposed by the Wilkites.<sup>1</sup>

At one period it seemed probable that Wilkes would have a considerable number of followers in the new Parliament. However, several of his nominees met with unexpected failure. In the City of London he carried Bull and Sawbridge and his brother-in-law George Hayley, but Richard Oliver, by gaining the support of the ministerial party, managed to defeat Brass Crosby. In Westminster, also, his two disciples, Lords Mahon and Mountmorres, for whom an easy victory had been anticipated, were beaten by

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register* (1774), p. 152; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1774), p. 444.

Earl Percy and Lord Thomas Clinton. Though the result was attributed to mismanagement, since Humphrey Cotes was allowed to stand as a third candidate while the name of Edmund Burke had also been submitted to the electors, the seat was won by the assiduity of the Duchess of Northumberland, who came to canvass for her son in Covent Garden, and, fawning upon the mob in the best Wilkes manner, fairly beat him at his own game. In the end the demagogue's party numbered about a dozen, whom with characteristic profanity he dubbed his "Twelve Apostles."<sup>1</sup>

It was on the 2nd of December, 1774, that Wilkes took his seat, after being ostracised from Parliament for the space of eleven years. Two months later he raised the question of the Middlesex election, moving that the Resolution of the 17th of February, 1769, which expelled him from the House, should be expunged from the Journals, "as subversive of the rights of the whole body of electors of the Kingdom." Much curiosity had been aroused by the motion, and there was the compliment of a full House when he rose in his place. Although one of his sarcasms was levelled at the king, whom he likened to "imperial Jove, pointing his thunderbolts red with uncommon wrath" at his devoted head, the speech was a temperate one, so temperate indeed that it conveyed the fatal impression of insincerity. Having declared that "the noble lord in the blue ribbon," by proposing the expulsion, had "committed high treason against Magna Carta," he assured Lord North, to whom he was referring, in a stage whisper that he "only said so to please the fellows who followed him." Otherwise it was a fluent and well-ordered oration, full of common-sense, logical and intelligent, occasionally gleaming with a flash of eloquence. The occasion was

<sup>1</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, Oct. 15-18, 1774; *Journal of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 422-4, 427-8; *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, 15th Report, Appendix, Part VI, 315; 13th Report, Appendix, Part VI, 134; *Correspondence of E. Burke*, i. 471, 475-6; *The Harcourt Papers*, vii. 315; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), ix. 70-1, 74.



memorable owing to Charles Fox's justification of the expulsion, and because James Luttrell confessed that he had always disapproved of his brother's candidature. After an eight hours' debate, the Government defeated the motion by a majority of 66, but 171 members followed Wilkes into the division lobby. An amusing incident occurred during the evening. Charles Van, member for Brecon, had asserted that Wilkes had been judged guilty of blasphemy. The Lord Mayor at once called him to order, and showed that there was no truth in the statement.

"A puppy!" he muttered audibly, after he had routed his antagonist; "does he think I don't know what is blasphemy better than he does!"<sup>1</sup>

Wilkes proved an admirable Lord Mayor just as he had been an admirable Sheriff. Sobered by the responsibility of office, he did not allow the theories of the demagogue to clash with the duties of the administrator. Having much of the martinet in his disposition he would never tolerate the smallest laxity in his subordinates, demanding the most perfect discipline and efficiency from those who worked under his command. Although careless as regards his own affairs, he had a natural capacity for public business. A Government department would have been safe in his hands, but he would have reduced the family distillery to bankruptcy in a twelvemonth, a talent for administration being wholly different from the ability of the tradesman.

Much stricter in his control of the markets than any of his predecessors, many of Wilkes's regulations were far in advance of his age. The treatment of cattle, brought to Smithfield and elsewhere, became far more humane under his rule, the City Marshal being instructed to suppress all cruelty. A vigorous crusade was directed against tradesmen who gave short weight, and the practice of raising

<sup>1</sup> *Journals of the House of Commons*, xxxv. 141; *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 374-6; *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes* (1786), 19-39; *Journal of Reign of George the Third*, H. Walpole, i. 464-6; *Correspondence of George the Third with Lord North*, i. 234; *Annual Register* (1775), 93, 101.

prices by forestalling or "cornering the market" was punished with severity. A disciple of the old school of economics, like most of his contemporaries, Wilkes made use of all the power that he possessed to regulate the price of provisions, his inclinations being to make reductions out of sympathy for the poor. Having organised a special charity for the benefit of prisoners, he was able to distribute a considerable sum at Christmas time among the various gaols. One of his most admirable reforms had the effect of clearing the streets of the city of disorderly women. Being informed by a deputation of London merchants that it was inconvenient for them to attend at Guildhall, as it was so far from the Exchange, he agreed to hold a court in future at the Mansion House.<sup>1</sup> In a dispute over a municipal election he refused to sanction a decision of the Court of Aldermen, believing it to be an unjust one, and after a desperate struggle he managed to work his will—a most popular victory and a memorable tit-for-tat with his old enemies.<sup>2</sup>

Before long society began to change its attitude in some degree, and no longer tabooed his hospitality. On the 17th of February, 1775, the Archbishop of Canterbury and five other bishops dined with him at the Mansion House, while a brilliant company attended the Easter ball on the 18th of April, one of the most princely entertainments ever given by a Lord Mayor.<sup>3</sup> To his own family circle he was most liberal, inviting his nearest relatives repeatedly to the various banquets, few of his old friends also having reason to complain of his neglect. None of his predecessors ever gave a greater number of private dinner-parties. Naturally

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register* (1775), 105; *Middlesex Journal*, Nov. 10-12, 17-19, 19-22, 22-24; Dec. 6-8, 17-20, 22-24, 24-27, 29-31, 1774; *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 2 and 9, 1775; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 174.

<sup>2</sup> *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 146-9; *Middlesex Journal*, Dec. 1-3, 8-10, 1774.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post*, April 19, 1775; *Memoirs of the Colman Family*, R. B. Peake, i. 334-5.

his expenses were enormous, larger probably than those of any previous Lord Mayor, reaching the sum of £8226, or £3337 in excess of the income allowed to support the dignity of the office. Three years before he had spent £1800 during his shrievalty. Then, no doubt, Frederick Bull was the loser. Now, it was his creditors.<sup>1</sup>

Having seen him break a lance with the House of Commons and humiliate the Court of Aldermen, most of the patriots would have been grievously disappointed if the mayoralty of their leader had run its course without a passage at arms with the king. In order to provide the opportunity the Livery of London drew up a petition, "praying for the removal" of Lord North and his cabinet, "for their iniquitous measures" with respect to their "fellow subjects in America."<sup>2</sup> Nothing loth, the Lord Mayor accepted the responsibility of presenting the remonstrance, leading a civic procession to St. James's on the 10th of April, an inquisitive crowd flocking in his train. Nevertheless, there was no repetition of the Beckford interlude, Wilkes being far too sensible to try to wrangle with his Sovereign *in propria personâ*. Still, something of the kind had been anticipated, for on his arrival at the palace he was informed that His Majesty desired that he would not speak to him.

"The caution is needless," he replied calmly, "for I never expected the honour."

So exemplary, indeed, was his behaviour that the king remarked, after the deputation had departed, that he had "never seen so well-bred a Lord Mayor."<sup>3</sup> Yet George had treated the petitioners with the greatest contempt,

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, June 19, 1776.

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1775), p. 203; *London Magazine* (1775), pp. 209-10; *Town and Country Magazine* (1775), p. 220; *Annual Register* (1775), p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 11, 1775; *Journal of Reign of George III.* H. Walpole, i. 484; *Letters to and from Lord Malmesbury*, i. 301; *Correspondence of George the Third with Lord North*, i. 242.

telling them that he was "struck with astonishment that any part of his subjects should encourage the rebellious disposition which prevailed in some of his colonies."

Although careful to behave as a gentleman in his intercourse with his Sovereign, Wilkes showed no lack of courage in defending the privileges of his fellow-citizens. Having received a letter from the Lord Chamberlain, two days later, intimating that His Majesty would listen to no petition or remonstrance in future unless it came from the "body corporate," he returned a firm answer, maintaining the right of the Livery to present an address to the king.<sup>1</sup> In order to put the question to the test a fresh petition, at his instigation, was drawn up at the next Common Hall protesting against the American War, and the Sheriffs were instructed to inquire whether George the Third would receive it, "sitting on the throne." Naturally, George the Third refused to give any such undertaking, declaring that he alone must decide the place, an answer which the Livery condemned as "evasive, nugatory, and insulting," Wilkes announcing publicly that, as His Majesty would not receive them "sitting on the throne," he thought it his duty not to go on with the address. Instead, resolutions were passed, informing the king that his answer was a direct denial of the right of the court to have their petitions heard. Having vindicated their principles in this manner each of the two enemies was ready to accept the compromise. A new address was prepared, which the king agreed to receive "sitting on the throne," as it came from the city in a corporate capacity, and it was duly presented at St. James's Palace by the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Common Councillors.<sup>2</sup>

Wilkes was fortunate in being assisted by a most popular

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, May 6, 1775; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1775, pp. 220-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, June 26, 29; July 5, 6, 15; *Morning Post*, June 26; July 4, 10, 1775; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1775), pp. 302, 347; *Annual Register* (1775), pp. 107, 255; *Hist. of England*, J. Adolphus, ii. 254.

Lady Mayoress. With much of her father's aplomb, but sincere and unaffected, a bright conversationalist, and noted for her taste in dress, his beloved daughter played her part more successfully than it ever had been played before. One forgot the plainness of her features in the elegance of her manners, for her schooling was that of Paris of the Pompadour, giving her every charm that art can bestow on womanhood. Though a great heiress and now in her twenty-fifth year, no eligible suitor had come forward. Only Captain Kendal, an Irish adventurer, for a time was believed to have serious intentions. The sole piece of gallantry of which she had been the heroine was a challenge sent by Tiger Roach to a brother officer who had spoken slightly of her personal appearance. Possibly her father was to blame for the lack of wooers. While granting her absolute liberty, his personality wholly dominated her life, monopolising all her thoughts and actions. Being so deeply in love with him, it appeared as if she had no desire for any other affection.

At midsummer in this year Wilkes made his brother-in-law, George Hayley, one of the Sheriffs. Originally manager to Samuel Storke, the first husband of the patriot's termagant sister, Hayley had obtained possession of a lucrative business by marrying the widow of his late master. A quiet, amiable soul, with commerce as his chief joy, he was content to be ruled by his wife at home, while allowing Wilkes to shape his public career. By industry and intelligence he had amassed a large fortune. Having an unbounded admiration for his famous relative he submitted to the inevitable borrowings without complaint, considering himself amply repaid by sharing some of the glory of his reputation. Out of gratitude Wilkes had made him an alderman and a member of Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

Although not an unattractive woman in early life the

<sup>1</sup> *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, i. 325; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 4, *et passim*.

tempestuous Mrs. Hayley bore a great resemblance to her brother John, a likeness that grew more accentuated as she advanced in years. All the family stood in awe of her "brimstone qualities." It was believed that "an outrageous quarrel" with her mother in the sick-room of her sister Sally had been the direct cause of the invalid's death.<sup>1</sup> Incessant headaches seem to have been the cause of many of her explosions of wrath. Kind at heart but destitute of self-control, she loved to augment her reputation for eccentricity. Her handsome coach with four black horses was driven faster than any other vehicle in the town. Fond of attending all the remarkable trials, she would never obey the judge's request for women to withdraw from the court, listening to the most unsavoury evidence without a blush. While the unhappy Dr. Dodd was being condemned to death for forgery she sat unconcerned in one of the galleries of the Old Bailey, eating gingerbread nuts with a tankard of negus by her side.<sup>2</sup> Despising her own sex she sought the company of men, and being a brilliant talker, like her brother, her society was in great request. Even with her only daughter she was never on good terms.<sup>3</sup> \*

Poor Humphrey Cotes died during Wilkes's mayoralty, passing away on the 1st of May while his old friend was engaged in the altercation with the Lord Chamberlain. Latterly the thriftless wine merchant had fallen upon more prosperous days. In the winter of 1772, six years after the death of his first wife, he had married the widow of Savage Barrell of Vauxhall, whose husband had been a

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,869, f. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Morning Post*, Feb. 25, 1777.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, i. 325-33; *Historic Houses of Bath*, R. E. Peach, pp. 5, 119-21; *Recollections of Samuel Breck*, pp. 109-14; *Old Farmer and his Almanack*, G. L. Kittridge, pp. 10-14; *Works of Sir J. Reynolds*, A. Graves and W. Cronin, iii. 1054, iv. 1436; Add. MSS. 30,869, f. 98; 30,872, f. 219; 30,879, f. 292; *Morning Herald*, Nov. 7, 1783; *Morning Post*, Sept. 30, Dec. 7, 1784; April 27, July 21, 1785.

wealthy Supporter of the Bill of Rights.<sup>1</sup> During the following summer Wilkes visited the pair at Littlehampton, spending much of his holiday in their company, and the two old comrades had remained on the best of terms for more than twelve months afterwards. At the Westminster election Cotes received his friend's vote, although not regarded by the patriots as one of their official candidates.<sup>2</sup> Then a little later came a quarrel, their first serious dissension, and the breach was never healed. Soon after becoming Lord Mayor the tolerant Wilkes, anxious for a reconciliation, sent a friendly message to the offended Cotes, suggesting that he should supply all the wine that was used at the Mansion House. The proposal occasioned as neat a retort as any that Wilkes ever uttered.

"Have my wine," returned the implacable Humphrey; "tell the Lord Mayor that he shall never have my wine—even though I knew he would pay for it!"<sup>3</sup>

Towards the close of his mayoralty, which had brought him nothing hitherto but triumph and renown, Wilkes experienced one of the most painful humiliations of his life. On the 10th of October a footman came to the Mansion House with a letter from Mr. John Barnard of Berkeley Square, the valetudinarian son of a famous alderman of London.<sup>4</sup> Only a fortnight previously he had dined with the Lord Mayor, to whom for obvious reasons he was a *persona grata*, and Wilkes opened the communication without the least uneasiness. Its contents staggered him. In terms of bitter reproach his old friend announced that Mrs. Barnard had made a confession of her infidelity. The conscience of the guilty woman having been troubled by a dream, in which the vision of her dead child had

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Dec. 1, 1772.

<sup>2</sup> *London Magazine* (1774), p. 509.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post*, April 17, 1775.

<sup>4</sup> *English Merchants*, H. R. Fox Bourne, i. 425; *Old and New London*, E. Walford, iv. 333; "Will of John Barnard," P.C.C. 588, Rockingham; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1785), p. 155.

appeared to her, she had flung herself upon her knees in an agony of remorse and had told her husband that Wilkes had betrayed his honour.<sup>1</sup>

Much distressed, for the wealthy recluse had been an invaluable friend, Wilkes sent an evasive note to Barnard, begging for an interview at the Mansion House. The other replied that he was "too ill to go out in the evening," suggesting sternly that it was the Lord Mayor's duty to call on him. After some idle correspondence the appointment was made, and Wilkes came to Berkeley Square. With clever guile he made some show of sympathy, but ridiculed the story of the daughter's ghost, hinting that it was the delusion of a hysterical woman, and protesting his own innocence. Grim and inexorable, for he had good reason for his suspicions, Barnard denied that his wife was deranged, proposing, in order to disprove the insinuation, to confront her with his visitor. Even the audacity of Wilkes shrank from such an ordeal, and with some haughtiness he declined.

A few days later the injured husband wrote again to the Mansion House. No letter that Wilkes ever received can have galled him more sorely, although it was not the bitter vituperation, but the disappointment of a long-cherished expectation that caused his distress. In spite of his infirmity poor Barnard was able to take an ample revenge. Reiterating his belief in the truth of his wife's story he told Wilkes that he had lost "the sincerest, the most affectionate and disinterested friend" that he had "ever had in the whole world." With the fretful hysteria of the invalid he took a fierce joy in explaining how it was in his power to impose an adequate punishment. Enclosing a copy of his will, in which he had left Wilkes a sum of £8000, as well as a collection of books and prints, worth upwards of £2000, he announced that these legacies had been cancelled that morning.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880, B. f. 30.



In a letter of vindication the dismayed Wilkes protested that the lady had made a false confession in order that he should be disinherited. Yet unluckily for this plea John Barnard was able to retort that his wife was ignorant of the manner in which he intended to dispose of his property. To this last communication Wilkes did not venture to reply, but a few days later, with singular effrontery, he sent "a very fine" hare with his compliments to his eccentric friend. The present was returned immediately, followed by a fresh tirade from the poor recluse, lamenting that he had been so long "the dupe of the most consummate villain." For many months Wilkes tried in vain to convince Mr. Barnard that he was innocent, suggesting always that his wife had made her confession in a moment of temporary insanity, but the other refused to listen to his protests. Indeed the patriot's guilt appears to have been obvious. The only extenuation of his treachery, if such it be, lies in the fact that Mrs. Barnard had been his mistress before her marriage, as the injured husband was well aware.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letters from Mr. and Mrs. Barnard to Wilkes in Add. MSS. 30,880, B. ff. 29-57; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 24-8. •

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN THE HOUSE

1774-1782

**W**ITH the close of 1774 the tide in the affairs of John Wilkes had reached its flood. After a ceaseless struggle of more than five years his faithful followers had succeeded in giving him a place in the House of Commons: at the third attempt they had made him also the first magistrate of the City of London. A hard-won triumph invariably calls forth great expectations, the victors looking forward to the enjoyment of the fruits of conquest without undue delay, or anticipating at least that their recompense shall be something more than a barren honour. Hence the innumerable instances where the oscillation of the political pendulum is caused by the disillusionment of those who have striven for the unattainable or where the demagogue has been dethroned owing to the disappointment of ambitions that he cannot gratify. As soon as Wilkes was seated among the law-givers the new party of progress waited impatiently for the fulfilment of the hopes that he had held out to them. Not unnaturally they believed that he would prove as puissant in the senate as he had been in the market-place, expecting that his legislative achievements would justify his promises.<sup>1</sup> Since his political programme was half a century in advance of his age the aspirations of his followers were too exacting. It was inevitable that disenchantment should follow and

<sup>1</sup> So George Grenville had prophesied on Feb. 3, 1769, in his great speech in the House of Commons on Wilkes's expulsion, v. *Parliamentary History*, xvi. 546.

the tide of his popularity begin to ebb. That the disenchantment was a gradual process and that the tide ebbed very slowly was due wholly to his personal magnetism and wonderful sagacity.

When Wilkes took his seat in the new House of Commons on the 2nd of December, the Opposition regarded him with little more favour than the ministry. Like all who have repudiated the trammels of party discipline, he had committed a political offence almost as heinous and unforgivable as one who has deserted to the other side. The recent dispute with Edmund Burke over the candidature for Westminster had increased the mistrust of the Rockingham faction.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Sir George Savile none of the prominent Whig leaders would have any dealings with him. In the Upper House there was no one but his fellow symposiast, "the wicked" Lord Lyttelton, who could be relied upon to give him assistance. Despite their antagonism in city affairs Lord Shelburne was the only statesman with whose policy he was in sympathy, but the enmity of Oliver and Townsend made an alliance impossible. So he stood alone with his little band of disciples, bearing the ominous badge of independence like "hay upon his horns," and every party was on its guard against him.

Undoubtedly his programme was intolerable to the most progressive Whig. He vociferated still that "the voice of the people is the voice of God." Among his followers the famous resolutions promulgated by the Supporters of the Bill of Rights three years before continued to be the test for all parliamentary candidates, who were required to sign a declaration, promising to support a drastic reform bill and other revolutionary measures.<sup>2</sup> Not only were the terms of the required pledge abhorrent to official Whiggism, but the principle itself was regarded with

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence of E. Burke*, i. 475-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, Sept. 27-29, 1774; *Letters of Junius* (Bohn, 1908), ii. 71-4; *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*, G. S. Veitch, p. 32.

antipathy in the belief that it would reduce the representatives of the people to the position of delegates. Yet the great families who cherished the dogmas of "the glorious revolution" failed to realise that their views were as retrogressive as those of the Wilkites were extreme, and that, while the spirit of the age demanded that the Member of Parliament should become more regardful of his constituents, the relations between them might be modified in harmony with the theory of the constitution. To Wilkes is due the credit (if such it is) of being the first to make the relationship between the representative and the electors a more intimate one.<sup>1</sup>

The demagogue had now reached his forty-ninth birthday. It was seventeen years ago that he had been first elected for Aylesbury. Eleven years had passed since he sat in his place in the House. During the whole of his political life he had been a recognised member for only six years. In spite of an occasional attack of ague he was in the full vigour of manhood, cautious in diet and most abstemious, careful to preserve his health by fresh air and exercise.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding his previous failure as a parliamentary orator his great name gave him an assured position, and it was inevitable that he should possess the ear of the House whenever he chose to appeal to it.<sup>3</sup> Already a far more formidable political force than Beckford or any other city magnate ever had been, it needed but an alliance with one of the segments of the Opposition to make him the leader of a powerful faction. Old parliamentary hands, who remembered when Chatham himself was equally obnoxious to his king, must have watched the career of the present demagogue at this time with a curious interest.

The ministers were disposed to be tolerant. Lord North,

<sup>1</sup> *Constitutional History of England*, Erskine May, ii. 70-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Reminiscences of H. Angelo* (1904), ii. 42; *Recollections of S. Rogers* (1887), p. 43; *Old Court Suburb*, Leigh Hunt, i. 37; *Annual Register* (1797), p. 377; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 165, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), i. 48.

still the Premier, was the most genial of men, and the general election had confirmed his great majority. At the polling-booths everywhere the cry of "Wilkes and Liberty" had aroused little enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> The member for Middlesex, on the other hand, obliged to justify his position, was eager for hostilities. With mischievous effrontery he spread the rumour that he should propose one Robert Macreath, member for Castle Rising, as Speaker, anticipating with perfect foresight that the prospect of an ex-waiter at Arthur's becoming First Commoner of England would throw George the Third into a fever of resentment.<sup>2</sup> And in his first speech in the House he protested against the anniversary of Charles the First's execution being kept as a day of mourning, declaring that "it should be celebrated as a festival, a day of triumph, not kept as a fast."<sup>3</sup> Like a famous character in fiction, Wilkes was always much perturbed by the mention of King Charles's head.

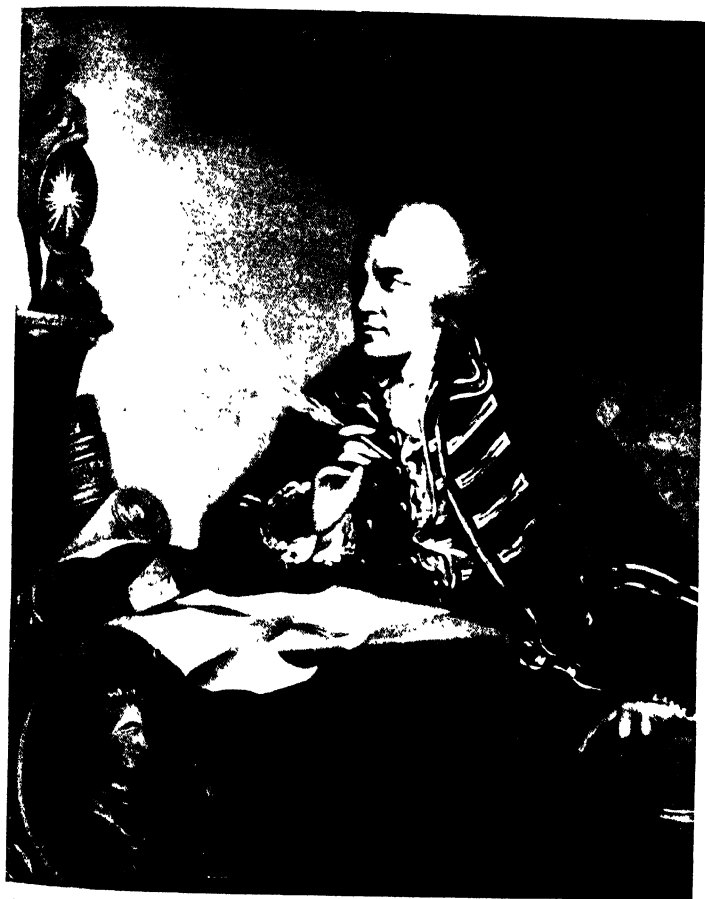
Ever willing to suspend judgment in regard to one whose reputation has been made outside the walls of Parliament, the House was prepared to listen to him with attention. Among its members there were many on both sides who did not dislike him personally, though they loathed his politics. All knew that he was too intelligent to conduct himself at St. Stephen's with the same rude arrogance that he employed to subjugate the backsliders at Guildhall. Notwithstanding his long intercourse with the humble cits, it was obvious to the most critical that "Jack had the manners of a gentleman," uncorrupted by evil associations. The old fastidiousness in attire was still unchanged, suits of brilliant hues with much gold lace appearing always on dress occasions.<sup>4</sup> And for morning attire he continued to

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, W. E. Lecky, iii. 525.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of George III to Lord North*, i. 217; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), ix. 102.

<sup>3</sup> *The Speeches of Mr. Wilkes* (1786), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 122; *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. Birkbeck Hill, iii. 68.



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JOHN WILKES

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wear the scarlet coat of a militia colonel, with military boots, his powdered hair fastened in a large bag, a button and loop ornamenting his three-cocked hat. On his return from Paris he had even been the pioneer of a strange new fashion, introducing the custom of using blue hair powder.<sup>1</sup>

Wilkes made a dozen set speeches in the House between 1775 and 1776. During the next two years he spoke sixteen times. In 1779 and 1780 he was reported at more or less full length on fourteen occasions. Such exertions were quite sufficient to assure his position as a prominent parliamentarian in that leisurely age. Although he had been labelled as "a wretched speaker" owing to his perfunctory efforts while member for Aylesbury, and was handicapped by his reputation as a mob orator,<sup>2</sup> few of his speeches offended the critical instincts of his fastidious audience. Every word being carefully prepared and learnt by rote, his rhetoric attained the high literary standard that satisfied the expectations of the elect. Other masterly speakers, like Lord North, were as imperfect in their utterance and as uncouth in their delivery, while his ability as an actor, combined with the wit, gaiety, and animal spirits of the man, more than compensated for the defects of his elocution.<sup>3</sup> Though failing as before to become a great debater, a gift seldom acquired without an arduous apprenticeship in early youth, he invariably made his mark on a full-dress occasion. One fatal fault, however, marred his parliamentary reputation, an attitude that the House of Commons has never tolerated. Whether intentionally or not, Wilkes generally managed to convey the impression of insincerity.

<sup>1</sup> *Recollections of John O'Keeffe*, i. 108; *Reminiscences of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 42; *Old Court Suburb*, Leigh Hunt, i. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vii. 178; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 142.

<sup>3</sup> For the best description of Wilkes as a parliamentary orator see *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), i. 265; ii. 48-50; iii. 178; v. 2-3. There is an excellent appreciation in Fraser Rae's *Wilkes, Sheridan, and Fox*, pp. 102-114.



It was more essential for him than for any other politician to demonstrate that he was in earnest. All through his public career the censorious had condemned him as a hypocrite, ringing changes upon the familiar jibe that "accident had made him a patriot." Nevertheless his delight in badinage caused him to assume the rôle in which his enemies wished him to appear, and he loved to turn the shafts of his wit against either his creed or his disciples.<sup>1</sup> The early jest in which he declared that he was proposing a motion merely "to please the fellows who followed him" was believed to have been the true explanation of his attitude towards most important questions.<sup>2</sup> Ministerial newspapers are able to allege with plausibility that it was his habit to refer to his constituents as "the Middlesex fools."<sup>3</sup> On one occasion when the House was about to adjourn he asked permission to make a speech, on the plea that he had sent a copy to the *Public Advertiser*, and that it was absurd for it to be printed without having been delivered.<sup>4</sup> His frequent murmurs against the heterodoxy of the clergy sounded as the merest cant in the mouth of such a notorious profaner of sacred things.<sup>5</sup>

The first serious speech that he delivered in the House of Commons was made in support of a motion that was moved by Alderman Sawbridge "for shortening the duration of Parliaments," a favourite panacea with the primitive Radicals.<sup>6</sup> According to the *Town and Country Magazine* he "particularly distinguished himself."<sup>7</sup> On three occasions during the same year he spoke vehemently and at great length against the measures that were being used to coerce the rebellious colonists in America. Each of these set

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Life of Lord Sidmouth*, G. Pellew, i. 76-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 465.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post*, Feb. 2, 1780.

<sup>4</sup> *Records of my Life*, J. Taylor, i. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Speeches on April 28, 1777; March 10 and 15, April 20, 1779; cf. *Morning Post*, May 3, 1777; March 18 and 24, 1779.

<sup>6</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 217.

<sup>7</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, vii. 73.

orations, in the words of a critic, was "spirited, classic, and stamped with the characteristic energy of his fearless mind."<sup>1</sup> Not unfrequently they had the true ring of eloquence. "A successful resistance," he declared, "is a revolution, not a rebellion. Rebellion indeed appears on the back of a flying enemy, but revolution flames on the breast-plate of the victorious warrior. Who can tell, sir, whether in consequence of this day's violent and mad address to His Majesty the scabbard may not be thrown away by them as well as by us ; and, should success attend them, whether in a few years the independent Americans may not celebrate the glorious era of the revolution of 1775, as we do that of 1688. The generous efforts of our forefathers for freedom heaven crowned with success, or their noble blood had dyed our scaffolds like that of Scottish traitors and rebels, and the period of our history which does us most honour would have been deemed a rebellion against the lawful authority of the prince, not a resistance authorised by all the laws of God and man, not the expulsion of a tyrant."<sup>2</sup>

Under no delusion with regard to the source of the trouble, he reiterated that the colonists were defending the principle that there should be no taxation without representation. "I call the war with our brethren in America an unjust, felonious war, because the primary cause and confessed origin of it is to attempt to take their money from them without their consent, contrary to the common rights of all mankind, and those great fundamental principles of the English constitution for which Hampden bled."<sup>3</sup> Like Chatham he foresaw that the Government had undertaken a hopeless task. "We are fighting for the subjection, the unconditional submission, of a country infinitely more extended than our own, of which every day increases the

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), i. 265.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes* (1786), pp. 16-17; *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 42; *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 734.

wealth, the natural strength, the population. Should we not succeed, it will be a loss never enough to be deplored, a bosom friendship soured to hate and resentment. . . . Success, final success, seems to me not equivocal, not uncertain, but impossible. However we may differ among ourselves, they are perfectly united. On this side the Atlantic party-rage unhappily divides us, but one soul animates the vast northern continent of America, the general congress and each provincial assembly.”<sup>1</sup> Apparently the ministry wished as usual to label him as a mere buffoon. “The Lord Mayor,” wrote Germain, the new Secretary for the Colonies, “was petulant and scurrilous, which occasioned a loud laugh instead of any indignation in the House.”<sup>2</sup>

In a speech a month later on the American question, Wilkes made a bitter attack upon this same minister, who, when Lord George Sackville, had been accused of cowardice in the Seven Years’ War; through his failure to lead his troops into action at the battle of Minden. “After a very bloody campaign you have conquered only one hill of less than a mile’s circumference. . . . Would the noble lord, whom His Majesty has lately raised to one of the highest civil offices, if he were sent on a military service, would he venture, even at the head of *the whole British cavalry*, to advance ten miles into the country?”<sup>3</sup> With prophetic instinct he foretold the issues of the struggle. “The Americans will dispute every inch of territory with you, every narrow pass, every strong defile, every Thermopylæ, every Bunker’s Hill. A train of most unfortunate events will probably ensue, and the power of recruiting, perhaps subsisting, your weakened forces, at such a distance, be lost. . . . The Americans, sir, are a pious and religious people. With much ardour and success they follow the first great command of Heaven, ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, pp. 44-5; *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 735.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. MSS. Comm.*, Stopford-Sackville MS. i. 137.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes* (1786), p. 49.

While they are fervent in these devout exercises, while the men continue enterprising and healthy, the women kind and prolific, all your attempts to subdue them by force will be ridiculous and unavailing, will be regarded by them with scorn and abhorrence. . . . They set out like a young heir with a noble landed estate, unencumbered with enormous family debts; while we appear the poor, old, feeble and exhausted, and ruined parent, but exhausted and ruined by our own wickedness, prodigality; and profligacy."<sup>1</sup> In the mouth of Burke or Chatham such imagery might have thrilled the auditors. From the lips of Wilkes it could not fail to raise a smile.

On the 21st of March of the following year he moved his long-expected motion for leave to introduce his Reform Bill, making, in the words of the *Public Advertiser*, "a very ingenious and public-spirited speech."<sup>2</sup> It was his privilege to be the first politician to propose a large extension of the franchise and a drastic redistribution of seats. Laying down the proposition that the representation of the people in Parliament had become "insufficient, partial; and unjust," he contended that originally it "was founded by our ancestors in justice, wisdom; and equality. . . . It becomes our duty," he argued, "to restore to the people their clear rights, their original share in the legislature."<sup>3</sup> Although formulating no detailed plans, he made it plain that his proposals were comprehensive enough to satisfy the most ambitious reformer. "I do not mean, sir, at this time," he observed, "to go into a tedious detail of all the various proposals. . . . When the bill is brought in and sent to a committee it will be the proper time to examine all the minutiae of this great plan. . . . I will at this time, sir, only throw out general ideas, that every free agent in this kingdom should, in my wish, be represented in Parliament ;

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, pp. 50-2; *Parliamentary History*, xviii., 1009-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, March 22, 1776.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, pp. 57, 61; *Parliamentary History*, xviii., 1288, 1291.

that the metropolis, which contains in itself a ninth part of the people, and the counties of Middlesex, York and others, which so greatly abound with inhabitants, should receive an increase in their representation; that the mean and insignificant boroughs, so emphatically styled 'the rotten part of our Constitution,' should be lopped off, and the electors in them thrown into the counties; and the rich, populous, trading towns, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, and others, be permitted to send deputies to the great council of the nation."<sup>1</sup>

In the course of his speech he could not resist a sinister but irrelevant jibe at his old enemy Lord George Germain, paraphrasing the celebrated expression, used by Lord Chatham at the time of the Seven Years' War, that he "had conquered America in Germany."

"East Grinstead," sneered Wilkes, pointing to the Colonial Secretary, "has only about thirty electors, yet gives a seat among us to that brave, heroic lord at the head of a great civil department, now very military; who has fully determined to *conquer America—but not in Germany*."<sup>2</sup> Lord North replied to the fulminations of the demagogue in terms of banter, invariably tolerant towards the whimsical antagonist, who on his side never showed any malice against his persecutors. Moreover, it seemed the best policy not to treat him seriously.<sup>3</sup>

Wilkes was now staggering beneath a fresh burden of debt, owing in a large measure to the fact that his expenditure while he was Lord Mayor had exceeded his receipts by more than £3000. All sorts of expedients were necessary to raise money. The docile Bull being able no longer to accept

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, pp. 67-8; *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 1294-5; *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*, G. S. Veitch, pp. 44-6; *Constitutional History of England*, Erskine May, i. 394; *English Constitutional History*, T. P. Taswell-Langmead, p. 734.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 58; *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 1289; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), ix. 339.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xviii. 1298; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1776), p. 140.

his drafts, he was glad to receive loans from an unknown admirer, named Samuel Cutler, who corresponded with him anonymously under the sobriquet of "Philo-Wilkes." Dishonoured notes of hand, bearing his signature, often found their way to the office of Peter Fountain of Maiden Lane, the last of his long line of solicitors. In the hope that the Corporation of London would come to his rescue; he published the balance-sheet of his mayoralty, pleading that "it surely becomes the honour of the city to support the proper expenses" of the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs "without loss or prejudice to their families." Being a member of the House of Commons, he was protected against arrest by the privilege of Parliament, and, after striving without success to obtain a promise of payment, at last his creditors adopted the unusual course of presenting a petition to the Court of Common Council, praying for the discharge of all the debts that he had contracted at the Mansion House.<sup>1</sup>

When his embarrassments first began to press, he had amazed his friends by offering himself as candidate for the Chamberlainship of London, a most lucrative office that fell vacant in February 1776, owing to the retirement of Sir Stephen Janssen. Since he had always affected to be wholly indifferent to "a place," and had made a public statement in the days of the old Bill of Rights Society that he would never occupy this particular position, his change of attitude was regarded by some of his followers as the most rank apostasy.<sup>2</sup> Many of his warmest admirers wished his candidature to fail, while the vindictive Oliver used all his powers of intrigue against him. Owing to this dissension among the patriots, the ministerial party gained

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,872, ff. 1, 6, 8, 14, 17, 19, 23, 40, 44, 56, 63, 85, 92; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 82-3; *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 162-4; *Public Advertiser*, June 19, 1776; *Morning Post*, June 24, 1776; Oct. 24, Nov. 1, 1777; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1777), p. 506; *London Magazine* (1777), p. 532.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gazetteer*, May 30, 1771; *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ii. 109, 111.

an easy triumph. Benjamin Hopkins, a prosperous merchant in Broad Street, who had undertaken the hazardous task of opposing Wilkes, was returned at the head of the poll by nearly four hundred votes.<sup>1</sup> Nor was the result due to chance. When his rival had to submit himself for re-election at the following midsummer the demagogue challenged him once more, muttering dark complaints of bribery and corruption; but though he put forth all his powers, he was defeated by a majority almost three times as large as the previous one.<sup>2</sup> There was a similar result when he came forward as a candidate in the following year, notwithstanding that it was unusual to oppose the Chamberlain unless he were guilty of misconduct. On this occasion the patriots satirised their opponent as "Vulture" Hopkins, alleging that he was an unscrupulous money-lender, who made large profits out of minors, and the ministers in alarm were inclined to prohibit the production of a new comedy called *The School for Scandal*, fearing that the satire upon usury might prejudice the chances of their candidate. For the third time, however, Wilkes was beaten decisively, polling only 1228 votes against 2132.<sup>3</sup> For the moment the Livery of London seemed to have changed its allegiance. Addressing the House of Commons later in the year on the question of concluding peace with America, the demagogue lamented that the country was "still bleeding at every vein."<sup>4</sup>

"I deny that," interposed the jovial Richard Rigby, amidst a general laugh; "the city of London has stopped bleeding!"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 7, 9, 15, 17, 19, 21-4, 26-9; March 2, 1776; *Journal of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, ii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, June 20-1, 25-9; July 1-3, 5, 1776; *Morning Post*, June 25-8; July 5, 1776; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1776), pp. 285, 332; *Town and Country Magazine*, viii. pp. 334, 387.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post*, June 20, 25-8, 30; July 1, 2, 1777; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1777), p. 346; *London Magazine* (1777), p. 333; *Sheridan*, Walter Sichel, i. 550.

<sup>4</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> *Morning Post*, Nov. 28, 1777.

Although this last insolvency was a serious hindrance to his Parliamentary activity, doing irreparable damage also to his social prestige, Wilkes continued to strike many a vigorous blow on behalf of "the principles of the Revolution." Still believing, as he had declared many years before, that the character of George III was a composition of "hypocrisy, meanness, ignorance, and insolence," he lost no opportunity of making an attack upon him.<sup>1</sup> In a debate on the civil list, in the spring of 1777, his criticism of the king's expenditure surpassed the most audacious of his previous utterances. "How then, sir, has this debt been contracted?" he thundered. "There are no *outward and visible signs* of grandeur and expense. I will tell the House what is said without doors. . . . The nation, sir, suspects that the regular ministerial majorities in Parliament are bought . . . that in one instance we attend to the evangelical precept, 'give, and it shall be given unto you,' and the Crown has made a purchase of this House with the money of the people. Hence the ready, tame, and servile compliance to every royal edict issued by the minister. Inward corruption is the canker which gnaws the vitals of Parliament. It is almost universally believed, sir, that the debt has been contracted in corrupting the representatives of the people."<sup>2</sup> All knew that the charge, formulated so eloquently, was a true one. None but a man who was inspired by a great cause would have dared to accuse his king in the presence of the whole nation. It was at such moments that Wilkes rose to his loftiest heights.

Still more greatly daring, he sought leave to bring in a bill in the following year "to prevent the dangerous and unconstitutional practice of . . . granting money to the Crown . . . without the consent of Parliament." Besides being a studied attack upon the king, this was as bold a

<sup>1</sup> *Grenville Papers*, ii. 73-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, pp. 127-8; *Journal of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, ii. 110; *Town and Country Magazine*, ix. 237-8.



challenge to public opinion as his reprobation of Press Warrants. In an outburst of military enthusiasm many of the provincial towns had raised a regiment for service in America or for protection against French invasion, the officers of which regiments, by a promise from the Secretary for War, were to be entitled to half-pay. "These absolute engagements for public money to be afterwards voted by Parliament," protested Wilkes, "were made in direct violation of the rights of the representatives of the people, and are contrary to both the spirit and letter of this murdered constitution."<sup>1</sup> It was a speech of some merit, earning the support of Burke, but is chiefly memorable as an instance of Wilkes's indifference to popular odium when principle obliged him to defy it.

A few days later, in a debate on the Royal Annuity Bill, he found a fresh opportunity of letting loose the shafts of his wit against George the Third, in allusion to the wonderful fecundity of the king and queen, who, after sixteen years of married life, had already no less than twelve children. "The gratitude of this House to heaven increases every year," he exclaimed in mock solemnity, "with the fortunately prolific annual increase of the royal offspring. We triumph in those endearing pledges of our monarch's love, and the public felicity which an all-bounteous Providence continues to bestow on this peculiarly favoured nation. The kingdom at large contemplate with rapture His Majesty's numerous, and still, I hope, increasing progeny, as insuring even beyond our children's children, to the *nati natorum, et qui nascentur ab illis*, the blessings and glories of his reign."<sup>2</sup> This was pure farce, like much of his conduct when his humour eclipsed his good taste, and farce of this kind has never been held in great esteem in the House of Commons.

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, p. 238; *Parliamentary History*, xix. 1001; *Morning Post*, April 4, 1778.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches*, p. 255; *Parliamentary History*, xix. 1061; *Journal of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, ii. 255.

No phase of his public life is more admirable than his attitude towards religious liberty. Not only did he help to relieve the dissenting teachers and ministers from subscription to any of the Thirty-nine Articles, but in three eloquent speeches he spoke earnestly in favour of "an universal toleration." To the Catholic and to the Methodist alike, he was an equal friend. "I would not," he asserted in a felicitous phrase, "persecute even the Atheist. I think he has a right to toleration, and, for my own part, I pity him, for he wants the consolation which I enjoy."<sup>1</sup> Another of his aphorisms was equally appropriate: "Religion," he declared, "should teach us the most refined humanity, and all her ways should be peace. The bigot is seldom the virtuous, the meek, the amiable, or the learned character."<sup>2</sup> For the dissenting clergyman he had the highest praise. "I will venture, sir, to affirm," he declared, "that there are not in Europe men of more liberal ideas, more general knowledge, more cultivated understanding, and in all respects men better calculated to form the rising generation, to give the State wise and virtuous citizens, than the doctors Price, Priestley, and Kippis. Yet the rod of persecution hangs over them by a single thread, if they do not subscribe thirty-five articles and a half to our Church."<sup>3</sup> Towards the Catholics, actuated in this instance by no political bias, he showed the widest sympathy. "I think it would do honour to our Church," he pleaded, "to treat with tenderness all those who are unhappy enough not to be in her bosom. I admire the temper with which the late indulgences to the Roman Catholics were received. . . . Our master has told us, in the largest and most general terms, that 'where two or three are gathered together in His name He was in the midst of them.'"<sup>4</sup> There was a ring of truth in all his speeches on religious questions, which, had his love

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, p. 330; *Parliamentary History*, xx. 312.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches*, p. 336; *Parliamentary History*, xx. 316.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches*, p. 333; *Parliamentary History*, xx. 313.

<sup>4</sup> *Speeches*, p. 321; *Parliamentary History*, xx. 245.

of liberty not been identified with a love of licence, must have convinced his audience of his sincerity.

Wilkes was one of the first statesmen of his day to realise the importance of establishing a national library on an adequate scale. At the first opportunity he endeavoured to persuade the House of Commons to recognise the obligations of literature. "It is a general complaint," he observed, "that the British Museum is not sufficiently accessible to the public. This must necessarily happen from the deficiency of their revenues. The trustees cannot pay a proper number of officers and attendants. . . . But, sir, I wish their plan much enlarged, especially on two important objects, *Books* and *Paintings*. . . . London has no large public library. The best here is the Royal Society's: but even that is inconsiderable; neither is it open to the public. . . . The British Museum, sir, is rich in Manuscripts . . . but it is wretchedly poor in printed books. I wish, sir, a sum was allowed by Parliament for the purchase of the most valuable editions of the best authors, and an Act passed to oblige every printer, under a certain penalty, to send a copy of every publication he made to the British Museum." <sup>1</sup> The privilege that Wilkes desired the national library to enjoy had been granted by Parliament in the reign of Charles II, but the law was notoriously evaded, and sixty-five years passed by before a new Copyright Act confirmed the original intention of the legislature.

In the summer of 1778 Wilkes offered himself once more as a candidate for the Chamberlainship of London; in opposition to Benjamin Hopkins. For the fourth time he suffered a crushing defeat, the majority against him being nine hundred, many of the voters resenting his persistency in defying tradition by seeking to eject the holder of an office

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, pp. 141-2; *Town and Country Magazine*, ix. 239; *Morning Post*, May 3, 1777; *Wilkes, Sheridan, Fox, W. Fraser Rae*, pp. 108-9; C. Elliot Brown in *Notes and Queries*, 5th series, viii. 225.

that was usually enjoyed for life.<sup>1</sup> In the following year he was wise enough to allow his rival to be re-elected unopposed, apparently having abandoned all hope of gaining the coveted position. A few months later, however, the office became vacant again owing to the death of Hopkins, a lucky chance for Wilkes, who was almost at the end of his resources. So great was his poverty that "he was sometimes distressed for a guinea," but with cheerful courage he continued to assure friends that he "had his own good spirits to feed and clothe him." If asked what he intended to do, "Nothing," he had always replied, "I must still hang upon the chapter of accidents and wait to drive the first nail that offers."<sup>2</sup> With the new vacancy for the Chamberlainship came the desired opportunity. The prospect of his election no longer caused disunion amongst his followers, all being now agreed that the opportunity had come of rewarding the patriot for his services. Richard Oliver, too, was in the West Indies, broken in health and wealth, so the most formidable of his enemies was removed from his path. This time he was chosen by an overwhelming majority, his opponent, William Jones of Serjeant's Inn, who had been selected as the ministerial candidate, retiring from the field on the third day in a minority of nearly two thousand. In the case of the Middlesex election Wilkes was obliged to engage in five contests before he gained his seat. It was at the fifth attempt also that he became Chamberlain of London.<sup>3</sup>

During the whole of the American War Wilkes continued to be a most zealous friend of the United States, advocating the discontinuance of hostilities at every opportunity,

<sup>1</sup> *London and the Kingdom*, R. G. Sharpe, iii. 163; *Morning Post*, July 2, 1778; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1778), p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 82; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 228; *History of London*, B. Lambert, iv. 466.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post*, Nov. 17-19, 23, 25, 1779; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1779), p. 610; *Lady's Magazine* (1779), pp. 614-15; *Town and Country Magazine*, xi. 614; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 200; *Letters of Mrs. Delany*, v. 493.

striving to persuade the ministers that they had undertaken a hopeless task. Between 1775 and 1780, the years of his greatest parliamentary activity, he delivered ten set speeches in the House of Commons in favour of peace. "Let us treat with the liberal spirit of freemen and Englishmen," he pleaded at an early stage of the struggle. "Unconditional submission is unconstitutional submission, and becomes only the slaves of an arbitrary monarch. Force against the vast American continent, we have found, avails nothing. All coercion appears to be impossible. The attempts of violence have been followed with deep distress, disgrace, shame, and disappointment. Let us, therefore, at last, hear and obey the voice of reason, which calls aloud upon us to save ourselves and our brethren."<sup>1</sup> The employment of Indians as auxiliaries by the British generals excited his bitter wrath, and he drew many lurid pictures of massacres by scalping-knife and tomahawk.<sup>2</sup> After the disaster of Saratoga he demanded "an immediate cessation of arms" unconditionally. "It may save the fragments of this dismembered empire," he prophesied, "for I own I shall tremble for the fate of Canada, nearly lost three years ago, as well as for Nova Scotia, the two Floridas, and even the West Indian islands, if the powerful confederation of the thirteen United Colonies continues."<sup>3</sup> In language of the bitterest scorn he emphasised the obvious truth that the Americans were resolved to maintain their independence. "They no longer consider themselves as embarked with us on board this sinking vessel of State," he told the House of Commons later in the year. "They avoid us as a tyrannical, unprincipled, rapacious, and ruined nation. Their only fear is that the luxury and profligacy of this country should gain their people."<sup>4</sup> During the following autumn, when opposing a vote of thanks to Lord

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 191; *Parliamentary History*, xix. 426.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches*, pp. 187, 188, 199, 226-9, 270, 272, 276, 303.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches*, p. 230; *Parliamentary History*, xix. 815.

<sup>4</sup> *Speeches*, p. 299; *Parliamentary History*, xix. 1335.

Cornwallis and other commanders, he summed up in one phrase the whole reason of his opposition to the war. "Every friend of the constitution saw early in the support of the American cause a vindication of the rights of Englishmen against an old exploded usurpation of the Stuarts, revived under the third prince of the House of Brunswick."<sup>1</sup> With equal truth he might have added that the same emotions which aroused the struggle on behalf of "Wilkes and Liberty" had inspired the Americans to fight for their independence.

In the month of September 1780 he was returned again at the general election for the county of Middlesex without opposition, his colleague being George Byng, ex-member for Wigan, who had been prevented by a party trick from gaining the seat on the death of Sergeant Glynn twelve months previously.<sup>2</sup> Henceforth Wilkes addressed the House of Commons less frequently, weary no doubt of appealing to unsympathetic ears. An immense egoism, such as his, being as sensible of incompetence as of ability, he must have been aware of his true position in Parliament. Having failed to acquire the art of extempore rhetoric he inspired no apprehension in debate, while his set orations, although often of superb eloquence, invariably had failed to convince as heretofore. So he sat silent and alone, calling himself "an exhausted volcano,"<sup>3</sup> regarding his isolation with cheery indifference, a little scornful, perhaps, in his secret soul that a glib fluency should be one of the chief credentials of statecraft.

Yet, notwithstanding his incapacity as an impromptu speaker, he might have reached the foremost rank among

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, p. 359; *Parliamentary History*, xxi. 892; *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), i. 265; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1781), p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *The Unreformed House of Commons*, E. Porritt, i. 247; *Morning Post*, Oct. 13, 27, 29, 1779; Add. MS. 30,875, f. 101.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 9; *The Oracle*, Dec. 29, 1797; *Morning Post*, April 3, 1788.

his fellow-senators, as many have done whose talents were far less splendid than his own, had this been the sole hindrance to his progress. The incidents of his career, however, reveal other causes. At the close of his mayoralty, in spite of all his art, his name began to lose its magic charm, except to the ears of his faithful constituents, and his prestige in Parliament was diminished in direct ratio to the decadence of his popularity. The petty squabbles of city politics, in which he was often a central figure, converted many loyal supporters into bitter antagonists. Attached to no party, always changing his friends, believed to be unscrupulous in regard to women and dishonest in money affairs, never free, moreover, from pecuniary distress, all the odium that lack of character attaches to a man rested upon him. Great though he was, Wilkes had not the supreme greatness which perseveres to the end. Since the future seemed to offer no prospect of parliamentary recompense to a person in his position, a foe alike to every party as well as to the king, he saw no reason to exhaust his energies in pursuing a chimera. Even had he realised that his reputation for insincerity was his heaviest incumbrance, it is doubtful whether he possessed sufficient self-restraint in these later years to change his habitual demeanour. Thus, although endowed with most of the attributes of the parliamentarian, with health, courage, and the gift of making a great oration on a great occasion, inspired by a noble cause, and, at the outset, an idol of the people, he failed to become a dominant power in the House of Commons. No man, who has written his name so indelibly in the Statute Book, was ever as unsuccessful in Parliament, and with his failure "the Crown devolved upon the King of England."

For eight years in succession Wilkes continued to bring forward his famous "annual motion," proposing that the resolution of the 17th of February, 1769, which declared him incapable of being elected a member of Parliament,

should be expunged from the journals of the House.<sup>1</sup> At last, on the 3rd of May, 1782, it was "resolved in the affirmative," one hundred and fifteen members voting in its favour and only forty-seven against it, the principle that the electorate shall be free to choose its own representatives, for which the member for Middlesex had struggled so long, being finally vindicated.<sup>2</sup> The Whig party was now in power, with Lord Rockingham as Premier, the late ministry having been driven from office by the triumph of the Americans. "I have now the happiness," declared Wilkes, in proposing this last of his annual motions, "of seeing the Treasury Bench filled with the friends of the constitution, the guardians and lovers of liberty." One of these friends, however, and he a giant among them, was unwilling to expunge the resolution. Alone among "lovers of liberty" Charles James Fox, the new Secretary of State, spoke against the motion, contending that the House of Commons (or, in other words, the Government inspired by the king) had been justified in expelling the member for Middlesex, "a privilege too valuable to be given up"; but, although voting with the minority, he admitted that he would not preserve the privilege if "the voice of the people" was against it.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, an ingenious attempt on the part of a convert to harmonise expediency with principle.

The idea of rewarding Wilkes for his incomparable services to the Whig party by giving him a Government office had never entered the heads of the Whig leaders. Such an appointment would have been refused with indignation by the king, and therefore no charge of ingratitude

<sup>1</sup> The following are the dates of Wilkes's annual motion: Feb. 22, 1775; April 30, 1776; April 29, 1777; March 12, 1778; Feb. 18, 1779; March 15, 1780; April 5, 1781; May 3, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 373; *Parliamentary History*, xxii. 1407; *Journal of House of Commons*, xxxviii. 977; *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), ii. 296; *Morning Herald*, May 4, 1782.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xxii. 1410; *Journal of the Reign of George the Third*, H. Walpole, ii. 542.



on account of the omission can be levied against Lord Rockingham. Such an independent auxiliary could not be regarded as having so great a claim upon him. Under any circumstance the elevation of one who did not belong to "the charmed circle of hereditary legislators" would have been an unusual phenomenon. By now, too, his popularity was no longer a menace, and he was becoming a silent member. Hence, the man to whom the Government was indebted far more deeply than even to Burke or to Fox, and who, with the exception of these two statesmen, would have been the greatest among the ministers, had he been one of them, sat neglected on the back benches. For many years later it was still possible to repudiate the most formidable tribune of the people.

But although office was closed against him he might have been rewarded with some post of profit. Apparently, he was not entirely hopeless of receiving such a recognition, for he sent a letter to congratulate Lord Rockingham as soon as his appointment was announced in the *Gazette*, and when Lord Shelburne succeeded as Premier a few months later he transferred his allegiance to the new leader, his hostility towards the old antagonist in city politics having died away since his election as Chamberlain.<sup>1</sup> Still, no attempt was made to provide him with a place. In this respect the Whigs of every denomination were equally ungrateful.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,872, f. 190; *Morning Herald*, August 10 and 28, October 22, November 13, 1782.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SOCIAL AFFAIRS

1776-1783

**P**OLLY WILKES cared little for politics. In her letters to her father they are seldom mentioned ; in his letters to her there is almost the same reticence.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps she understood with feminine intuition that there was nothing more to be gained by him in Parliament, and that his fame, for good or evil, was unalterably established. All her correspondence is devoted to social matters, containing pleasant gossip concerning friends and relatives. Whenever he was away from home upon one of his constant jaunts to Bath or Brighton she wrote to him several times a week, full of anxiety if he had been indisposed, taking a cheerful interest in his adventures when he was well. While he was absent, just as if he were at her side, she continued to give him advice in regard to his health, telling him to take his medicine and when and when not he might bathe in the sea.<sup>2</sup>

Wilkes, on his side, was equally affectionate in his letters to Polly. With the playful gallantry that he invariably assumed towards her he tells her that he is going "to drink the health of a most amiable young lady in Prince's Court," or calls her his "sweet Euphrosyne," or speaks of "that dear, happy day" on which she was born.<sup>3</sup> "I have a daughter," he writes, in acknowledging a present that she

<sup>1</sup> This omission is noticed in *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*, by G. S. Veitch, p. 44 n.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 167, 169, 171, 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 12, 38, 41.

had sent him, "the sweetest-tempered girl in the world, generous and noble-minded. She gives me both a purse and money, and writes me at the same time the prettiest, most elegant compliment possible, of more value than all the purses and money in the world, not equalled since the time of Madame de Sevigné. The purse I shall keep as long as I live; the money I shall lay out at Bath as a souvenir for her of one of the politest and most obliging actions I ever knew. I must always add, happy, happy father in such a daughter." <sup>1</sup>

In their communications to one another the two were almost as intimate and confidential as husband and wife. When Polly wrote to announce that the mistress of their eccentric friend Lauraguais had "given him a daughter," adding, "I am sorry it is not a son," Wilkes replied that the Count "would probably console himself as the two friends in La Fontaine's Contes do," <sup>2</sup> a startling reflection upon the Frenchman's morality. Upon the birth of Marie Antoinette's first child Miss Wilkes naïvely declared in her next letter to her father, "Il faut espérer que son auguste époux sera plus *habile* la première fois." To which the merry patriot responded with reproach, "Comment donc, est-ce que je n'ai pas été bien *habile*, quand j'ai fait un chef-d'œuvre neuf mois avant votre naissance. . . ? Et vous, petit ange, vous osez me reprocher que je ne suis pas assez *habile* !" <sup>3</sup> Some years later, when one of their acquaintances, named Mrs. Swinburne, expected to become a mother, Wilkes informed his daughter that he had "sent a hen-pheasant to Blenheim Street to her, if that event has not yet happened, and if it has, for Mr. Swinburne, for *having done his duty*." <sup>4</sup> Plain talk such as this, which has aroused the wrath of the modern Puritan, was a natural

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 251; *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 34; Add. MS. 30,879, f. 236; cf. *Œuvres de La Fontaine* (1827), iii. 55.  
<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 132.  
<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, iii. 244.

consequence of the wonderful intimacy between the pair. Yet, in the presence of company, Wilkes would allow no topic of conversation which could possibly offend his daughter's modesty.<sup>1</sup> In spite of her tolerance for the *doubles ententes* of her father, Polly was a most decorous young lady, against whose fair fame the voice of scandal has never whispered an evil word.

Occasionally a lightly-dropt remark showed that he hoped she would marry. "The greatest blessing which Heaven can bestow on any man," he told her, "is a daughter like you—unless, indeed, it be the favoured mortal who can call you his by a still closer connexion, and be perpetuated by another resemblance of yourself and him, which could complete my happiness as a father."<sup>2</sup> Apparently he had no notion that she was plain. "The little Grace of Prince's Court," he calls her in one of his letters; in another he speaks lovingly of her "pretty face." No one else, however, shared his admiration, and Polly Wilkes, great heiress though she was, could not find a lover.

Among his former acquaintances John Churchill and the Rev. Dr. Wilson still remained the most esteemed. The former continued to be his medical adviser, but he saw little of the latter except on his visits to Bath, where the poor dotard lived in platonic friendship with Catherine Macaulay, "the female historian," until her second marriage with the brother of a quack doctor terminated their intimacy.<sup>3</sup> One of his chief cronies during this period was Lord Irnham, the reprobate father of Colonel Luttrell, an amusing old rascal, perhaps the most dissolute peer of his age.<sup>4</sup> In Chase Price, M.P. for the county of Radnorshire,

<sup>1</sup> *Biographies of Wilkes and Cobbett*, Rev. J. S. Watson, pp. 111-12; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 89.

<sup>3</sup> *Historic Houses of Bath*, R. E. Peach, 1st series, p. 117; *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 62, 76, 84, 93, 115, 122, 124, 126, 135, 145, 165.

<sup>4</sup> *Wilkes's Diary*; Add. MSS. 30,866, *passim*; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 245.

he found another kindred spirit, almost equally famous as a humorist, and an even greater admirer of feminine charms.<sup>1</sup> With Lord Abingdon, a fellow-traveller in Italy, and Lord Kelly, whom he had known while an exile in Paris, he was on terms of the closest intimacy,<sup>2</sup> and distinguished fellow-members of the Beefsteak Club, such as the Duke of Norfolk and the Earls of Inchiquin and Effingham, were amongst his most familiar friends. Perhaps, however, his master of revels was a wealthy club-man, named Miles Peter Andrews, who invited him to many a cosy little dinner-party, along with Captain Ayscough and Edward Topham, on which occasions Miss Nancy Brown, the pretty actress, who was the host's sultana, and some other gay young ladies, whose names figured in "Harris's List," were always present to amuse the company.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes acquaintances from Paris like Suard, Lauraguais, the Neckers, or Beaumarchais, came over to London, receiving always the warmest welcome at Prince's Court.<sup>4</sup> Wilkes was famous for his hospitality.

The insatiable appetite for conviviality remained unabated, and his social activities were not in the least retarded by his duties as a city alderman and a member of Parliament. Except on the rare occasions when he was unwell he dined with friends or entertained guests in his own house almost every day. Apparently a movable feast, the time of dinner fluctuated indiscriminately between the hours of two and six in the afternoon, his own inclination being to postpone the meal, since he disliked late suppers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, ii. 207; *Memoirs of Tate Wilkinson*, ii. 176, iii. 163, 165, 169-72; *The Royal Register*, W. Combe, vii. 28-37; *Sketches and Characters*, P. Thicknesse, p. 93; *Letters of the Late Lord Lyttelton*, p. 123; *Memoirs of Lord Rockingham*, ii. 236.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, *passim*; *Wilkes's Diary*, *passim*; *Lettres de l'Abbé Morellet*, p. 175 n.

<sup>3</sup> *Town and Country Magazine*, viii. 9, xviii. 9; *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, ii. 289-98.

<sup>4</sup> *Wilkes's Diary*.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 26, 40, 50, 123, 149, iii. 127.

Although a great epicure, he was content with a small menu, and notwithstanding his love of good fellowship he drank most sparingly of wine.<sup>1</sup> Walking was the exercise upon which he relied most to keep himself in health, but he was often on horseback, sometimes even hunting, and, in spite of his age, he would bathe in the sea.<sup>2</sup> To please his daughter he appeared occasionally at the Ranelagh masquerades, but though on very familiar terms with David Garrick, he was not a great patron of the play-house. He was always most happy in those places where he was able to talk.

Amongst the old friends with whom he dined frequently was James Boswell of Auchinleck, who never failed to visit Prince's Court whenever he came to London. No one enjoyed the society of Wilkes more heartily than the humorous little Scotsman, and no one was more entertained by badinage at the expense of his fellow-countrymen. At every opportunity Wilkes made him the butt of his wit, knowing that the good-natured fellow would never resent the liberty. Once in the Old Bailey at a judge's dinner Boswell complained that his handkerchief had been stolen as he came out of the Session House. "Never mind him, my lord," ejaculated Wilkes, "it is the ostentation of a Scotsman to let the world know he has a handkerchief."<sup>3</sup> Almost as rude was a famous retort in reference to the scenery of Scotland. "You must acknowledge, my friend Wilkes," observed Boswell one day, "that the approach to Edinburgh from the London road presents a very picturesque and interesting picture." "Why, so perhaps it may," returned Wilkes, "but when I was there the wind was in my face, and it brought such a confounded stink that I was obliged to keep my handkerchief to my nose the whole of the way and could see nothing of the prospect."<sup>4</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, i. 140, ii. 217; *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 477 n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to His Daughter*, ii. 7, 10, 18, 35, 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post*, Feb. 15, 1786; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 226.

<sup>4</sup> *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 7.

reference to the lack of trees in Scotland, he once observed: "There Judas might have survived his desperate intention."<sup>1</sup> Probably the reason that Boswell was one of the few North Britons who could tolerate the anti-Scotticisms of his friend is explained by the fact that he knew that Wilkes had a great regard for him.

It had long been a matter of regret to the genial little barrister that Wilkes and Dr. Johnson, the two persons to whom he was most attached, were bitterly opposed to one another. Years ago, when writing to the exiled patriot from Venice, he had expressed a hope that Wilkes might be taught "the road to rational virtue and noble felicity" by the great lexicographer.<sup>2</sup> With the close of the triumphant mayoralty, when Wilkes bore a royal testimonial as a well-bred alderman, and all parties were agreed that the office had never been filled more worthily, Boswell began to think that it might be possible to arrange an interview between his two eminent friends. An invitation from Dilly, the bookseller, to meet Wilkes at dinner seemed to provide the long-desired opportunity, and the Scotsman suggested at once that Dr. Johnson should be asked too.

"What, with Mr. Wilkes?" cried Dilly, aghast at the proposal. "Not for the world. Dr. Johnson would never forgive me."

"Come," replied Boswell, "if you'll let me negotiate for you I will be answerable that all shall go well."<sup>3</sup>

Thus assured, Mr. Dilly agreed to send the second invitation.

It was a tremendous task that Boswell had undertaken so lightly, for Wilkes and Johnson were as repugnant to one another as the cross and the crescent. Ever since the days of *The North Briton*, in which the lexicographer was held up to ridicule as a pensioner and a hireling, the two

<sup>1</sup> *The Jerningham Papers*, i. 285.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,877, f. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. Birkbeck Hill, iii. 63.

antagonists had been engaged in continuous strife.<sup>1</sup> Invariably tolerant and forgiving to his bitterest foe, Wilkes was incapable of cherishing any deep animosity, but in the eyes of the loyal and pious Dr. Johnson the merry demagogue was the most dangerous and wicked marplot in the world. Soon after the affair of the general warrant the great moralist had called Wilkes "an abusive scoundrel," adding that "instead of applying to my Lord Chief Justice to punish him I would send half a dozen footmen and have him well ducked."<sup>2</sup> In his celebrated pamphlet called *The False Alarm* he was even more defamatory. "Lam-poon itself," he declared, "would disdain to speak ill of him of whom no man speaks well."<sup>3</sup> In the course of the essay he referred to the patriot as a "varlet," "a retailer of sedition and obscenity," and "a criminal from gaol."<sup>4</sup> Whenever he mentioned the man's name there was an explosion of wrathful scorn. "Sir," he once told Boswell, "had Wilkes's mob prevailed against the Government this nation had died of phthiriasis."<sup>5</sup> After Townsend had been elected Lord Mayor he remarked that it was extraordinary that "all the force of Government was required to prevent Wilkes from being chosen chief magistrate of London, though the liverymen knew he would rob their shops and debauch their daughters."<sup>6</sup> During Wilkes's mayoralty he had enunciated the famous aphorism which has been more often misapplied than any other in the English language: "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."<sup>7</sup>

Wilkes, on his side, had dealt the Tory champion some equally vigorous, if less vicious, blows. In *A Letter to Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, published in answer to *The False*

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton*, i. 99, 100, 101, 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, i. 394.

<sup>3</sup> *The False Alarm*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *The False Alarm*, pp. 29, 35, 51.

<sup>5</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 183 n.

<sup>6</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, v. 339.

<sup>7</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ii. 348.



*Alarm*, he had designated his opponent as a "spitter forth . . . of servility and bombast," mimicking with playful humour his robust and sonorous style. Describing the Johnsonian pamphlet as "the unwieldy exhibition of the gambols of a Colossus," he reminded "the sage" again that he was a pensioner, and referred sarcastically to his former "poor but honest state."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of their antagonism in politics and ethics, Boswell was aware that the two were by no means temperamentally unsympathetic, both being endowed with a grace of humour and a shrewd common-sense that could not fail to transport their minds across the gulf that divided them.

The Scotsman conducted his "negociations" in a manner worthy of the most skilful of diplomats. He knew that if he put the point-blank question: "Sir, will you dine in company with Jack Wilkes?" the old lexicographer would have flown into a passion and would probably have answered: "Dine with Jack Wilkes, sir! I'd as soon dine with Jack Ketch." So he had recourse to subterfuge, confident that he would gain his point owing to "the spirit of contradiction" which sometimes actuated his friend, and on the first opportunity when they were alone together he mentioned casually the bookseller's invitation.

"Mr. Dilly, sir, sends his respectful compliments to you," he began craftily, "and would be happy if you would do him the honour to dine with him on Wednesday next along with me, as I must soon go to Scotland."

*Johnson*. "Sir, I am much obliged to Mr. Dilly. I will wait upon him."

*Boswell*. "Provided, sir, I suppose, that the company which he is to have is agreeable to you?"

*Johnson*. "What do you mean, sir? What do you take me for? Do you think I am so ignorant of the world as to imagine that I am to prescribe to a gentleman what company he is to have at his table?"

<sup>1</sup> *A Letter to Samuel Johnson*, p. 33; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1770), p. 78.

*Boswell.* "I beg your pardon, sir, for wishing to prevent you from meeting people whom you might not like. Perhaps he may have some of what he calls his patriotic friends with him."

*Johnson.* "Well, sir, and what then? What care I for his patriotic friends? Poh!"

*Boswell.* "I should not be surprised to find Jack Wilkes there."

*Johnson.* "And if Jack Wilkes *should* be there, what is that to *me*, sir? My dear friend, let us have no more of this. I am sorry to be angry with you; but really it is treating me strangely to talk to me as if I could not meet any company whatsoever occasionally."

*Boswell.* "Pray forgive me, sir, I meant well. But you shall meet whoever comes, for me."<sup>1</sup>

Thus in the first act of the comedy Boswell had been as triumphant as Punchinello in Italian farce, but as a retribution, perhaps, for his duplicity towards his mentor, the laugh turned sadly against him in the next scene. For at the appointed hour on Wednesday, the 15th of May, 1776, when he waited on Dr. Johnson to accompany him to the dinner-party he found him "buffetting his books" in the study, having forgotten all about the engagement with Mr. Dilly. Moreover, he had promised to dine at home with Mrs. Williams, the blind dependent who lived in his house, and being too kind-hearted to disappoint the poor creature he refused to alter his plans unless she would consent. It seemed for the moment that the encounter with Jack Wilkes would not take place after all. The volatile Scotsman, however, was not easily baffled. Going to the old lady's room, he explained his dilemma, using all his power of cajolery to induce her to give up her claim to the great man's company. It was a difficult task, but at length, after listening to a full explanation, Mrs. Williams agreed that Dr. Johnson

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 66; *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, P. Fitzgerald, ii. 142.

ought to go. So, while "the sage" was putting on a clean shirt, a carriage was called, and the two friends were soon driving down the Strand to the house of their host in the Poultry. "When I had him fairly seated in a hackney-coach with me," Boswell confesses in his great biography, "I exulted as much as a fortune-hunter who has got an heiress into a post-chaise with him to set out for Gretna Green."<sup>1</sup> Evidently he had no misgivings about the consequences of his plot, believing that the tact and humour of the member for Middlesex could not fail to charm his old friend.

Wilkes undoubtedly was not in the least perturbed but perhaps a little elated at the prospect of meeting Dr. Johnson. It was a foible with him, just as it was with Boswell, to be acquainted with every man of mark, and he took a pride in turning his enemies into friends. He had no intention of flaunting the blue flag in the face of the old Tory, although the fear of being tossed and gored would not have deterred him. So he donned his best clothes in high spirits and went off to Mr. Dilly's, resplendent in gold lace and bright colours.

All the company were assembled when Dr. Johnson rolled into the room with Boswell strutting beside him. Most of the guests were strangers to the old man, and Wilkes, even more alert than usual, must have been amused to hear him ask the host to tell him their names.

"Who is that gentleman, sir?" was the first whispered question.

"Mr. Arthur Lee, sir," replied Dilly, indicating the well-known American revolutionary.

"Too, too, too," muttered Johnson in great displeasure under his breath, "and who is the gentleman in lace?"

"Mr. Wilkes, sir!"

The patriot had the opportunity of seeing the expression of consternation upon the face of the stubborn old Tory.

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii, 67-8.

as he took up a book and turned away in disgust to the window-seat, restraining his resentment with difficulty. But having declared that he could "meet any company whatsoever occasionally," he did not choose to show that the boast was an empty one.<sup>1</sup>

When dinner was at last announced Wilkes followed close upon Johnson's heels into the dining-room, and seating himself in the next chair began to chat agreeably. It was a strange study in contrast, the volatile epicurean in silk attire, and the unwieldy herculean stoic in his sombre clothes, the one prattling with merry insouciance, determined to please; the other with a surly scowl on his rugged face, deep in a sulk. It was not long before the quick tact of Wilkes had divined a way to ingratiate himself with his old enemy. In front of him stood a fine joint of veal, and remembering, no doubt, that Johnson was a famous gourmet, he began to help him with marked attention.

"Pray give me leave, sir, It is better here," he said, as he carved. "A little of the brown—some fat, sir—a little of the stuffing—some gravy." And when the plate was filled: "Let me have the pleasure of giving you some butter," he persisted. "Allow me to recommend a squeeze of this orange—or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest."

And while exerting himself to anticipate the old gentleman's wants Wilkes had the satisfaction of perceiving that he was not labouring in vain. The huge swaying form bent towards him, and the massive head bowed low.

"Sir, sir, I am much obliged to you, sir," repeated Johnson, and the patriot saw that the frown had begun to fade from the old man's brow, while the dim eyes no longer wore the look of anger. In a little while they were chatting amicably.<sup>2</sup>

The talk turned upon the stage, Garrick's name being

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, iii. 69.

mentioned, a dangerous subject in such company, since Johnson would never "allow anyone to attack Garrick but himself." Wilkes's first remark was complimentary, likening the wit of the great actor to Lord Chesterfield's, but when the doctor had told an anecdote about Foote and his small-beer, the patriot, remembering perhaps the occasion when the hospitality of the villa at Hampton had been denied to him, spoke of Garrick's avarice.

"He would have made the small-beer still smaller," he observed. "He is now leaving the stage, but he will play *Scrub* all his life."<sup>1</sup>

Johnson, however, who was now leading the conversation in perfect good humour, did not take offence, protesting merely that the actor was much more generous than the public imagined. The old man's interest was aroused and he was curious to hear how the celebrated jester would acquit himself.

A few moments later Wilkes seized an opportunity of poking fun at the Scotch, well aware that in this respect he was sure of his neighbour's sympathy.

"Among all the bold flights of Shakespeare's imagination," he exclaimed, "the boldest was making Birnam Wood march to Dunsinane; creating a wood where there never was a shrub; a wood in Scotland! Ha! ha! ha!"<sup>2</sup>

And in ridicule of the clannish slavery of the Highlands he declared that while on a visit to Inveraray it was apparent that he would be massacred by the tenants if he displeased their chief, for he knew that the story would amuse Dr. Johnson, who had recently been the guest of the Duke of Argyll and his beautiful duchess in their north-country home. Having found a bond of union with his former *bête noire* in their antipathy to Gaelic things, the old man began to be captivated by the charm of the

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 70; cf. *Correspondence of David Garrick*, i. 426-7; Add. MS. 30,877, f. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 73.

patriot. Soon they were gratifying another taste in common, discussing a contested passage in the *Ars Poetica*.

"We have no city poet now," said Wilkes; "that is an office which has gone into disuse. The last was Elkanah Settle. There is something in names which one cannot help feeling. Now Elkanah Settle sounds so queer; who can expect much from that name? We should have no hesitation to give it for John Dryden in preference to Elkanah Settle from the names only, without knowing their different merits."

"I suppose, sir," sneered Johnson, sure that the ex-Lord Mayor despised the city folk as much as he, "Settle did as well for Alderman in his time as John Home could do now!"<sup>1</sup>

The mention of Home suggested fresh jokes against North Britain; and some one having remarked at the moment that Scottish colonists were cultivating a barren part of America, Wilkes and Johnson began to vie with one another in good-humoured chaff at Boswell's expense.

"Why, sir, all barrenness is comparative," laughed Johnson. "The Scotch would not know it to be barren."

"Come, come, he is flattering the English," protested Boswell. "You have been in Scotland, sir, and say if you did not see meat and drink enough there?"

"Why, yes, sir," retorted Johnson, "meat and drink enough to give the inhabitants sufficient strength to run away from home."

"That, I should think," interposed Wilkes, "may be safely sworn of all the Scotch nation."

"You must know, sir," continued Johnson, turning confidentially to Wilkes, "I lately took my friend Boswell and showed him genuine civilised life in an English provincial town. I turned him loose at Lichfield, my native city, that he might see for once real civility: for you

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, iii. 76.

know he lives among savages in Scotland and among rakes in London."

"Except when he is with grave, sober, decent people," replied Wilkes, "like you and me."<sup>1</sup>

The old Tory began to talk of Mrs. Macaulay, "the female historian," whose vagaries were becoming more ridiculous every day.

"One day when I was at her house I put on a very grave countenance and said to her: 'Madam, I am now become a convert to your way of thinking. I am convinced that all mankind are upon an equal footing; and to give you an unquestionable proof, Madam, that I am in earnest, here is a very sensible, civil, well-behaved fellow-citizen, your footman; I desire that he may be allowed to sit down and dine with us.' I thus, sir, showed her the absurdity of the levelling doctrine. She has never liked me since."<sup>2</sup>

And Wilkes, who realised that the foolish woman was ruining the happiness of his old friend Dr. Wilson, was delighted with the anecdote. He was now far less attached to his old axiom that "the voice of the people is the voice of God."

So friendly had Johnson become towards him that he even ventured upon the verge of politics, talking "with all imaginable freedom of the ridiculous title" given to the Attorney General of *Diabolus Regis*.

"I have reason to know something of that officer," he explained demurely, "for I was prosecuted for a libel."

"Poor old England is lost!" he cried later, in allusion to the recent disaster in America, but the stubborn Tory, who rarely missed the opportunity of chastising a political opponent, was pleased to be indulgent towards his new acquaintance.

"Sir," remarked Johnson, changing the conversation

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, i. 447, iii. 77-8.

with a jest, "it is not so much to be lamented that Old England is lost as that the Scots have found it."

"Had Lord Bute governed Scotland only," answered Wilkes, "I should not have taken the trouble to write his eulogy, and dedicate *Mortimer* to him."<sup>1</sup>

When dinner was over Wilkes still continued to pay court to "the great Cham," holding a candle "to show a fine print of a beautiful female figure which hung in the room, and pointed out the elegant contour of the bosom with the finger of an arch connoisseur." Afterwards, in a conversation with Boswell, he "waggishly insisted that all the time Johnson showed visible signs of a fervent admiration of the corresponding charms of a fair Quaker." It was a most successful party in every respect, and on his return home the doctor informed Mrs. Williams that he had been greatly pleased with Wilkes's company.<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to his friend Mrs. Thrale on the next day the old man once more referred with evident gratification to the meeting at Dilly's. "For my part," he wrote, "I begin to settle and keep company with grave aldermen. I dined yesterday in the Poultry with Mr. Ald. Wilkes, Mr. Ald. Lee, and Counsellor Lee, his brother. There you sat all the while, so sober . . . and . . . you think by chance on Johnson, what is he doing? What should he be doing? He is breaking jokes with Jack Wilkes upon the Scots. Such, Madam, are the vicissitudes of things."<sup>3</sup> In Wilkes's diary, unhappily, there is merely the usual laconic entry: "Dined at Mr. Dilly's in the Poultry with Messrs. Edward and Charles Dilly, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Boswell, Arthur Lee, Miller of Bath Easton, Dr. Lettsom, &c."<sup>4</sup>

Still, it is evident that the patriot had not conceived any great veneration for the lexicographer. In spite of

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 78-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Samuel Johnson*, G. B. Hill, i. 397; *Letters to and from Johnson*, H. L. Piozzi, i. 325.

<sup>4</sup> Add. MS. 30,866.



their merry meeting, his political animosity blazed forth again before the end of twelve months. During his speech on the king's debts in the following spring, he went out of his way to make a fresh attack upon his old antagonist. "The two famous doctors, Shebbeare and Johnson," he thundered, "are . . . the state hirelings called pensioners. The piety of our Sovereign to the memory of his grandfather . . . should surely, sir, have prevented the names of these two doctors from disgracing the civil list, which both of them repeatedly and publicly declared the King's family had no right to. . . . These two doctors have in their writings treated the late King and King William with the utmost virulence and scurrility, and they are known as the pensioned advocates of despotism."<sup>1</sup>

Oddly enough, Johnson was never aware of this malediction, or if it came to his knowledge he bore it with unwonted humility. Five months later he spoke of Wilkes in terms of praise. "Did we not hear so much of Jack Wilkes," he observed, "we should think more highly of his conversation. Jack has great variety of talk, Jack is a scholar, Jack has the manners of a gentleman. But after hearing his name sounded from pole to pole as the phoenix of convivial felicity we are disappointed in his company. He has always been at me; but I would do Jack a kindness rather than not. The contest is now over."<sup>2</sup> In spite of the late fulmination, Wilkes, too, had no feelings of animosity against "the state pensioner." A few months later, when Boswell, who was fond of praising the one in the presence of the other, repeated a Johnsonian utterance on the subject of liberty, he exclaimed with good-humoured tolerance, "What! does *he* talk of liberty? *Liberty* is as ridiculous in his mouth as *religion* in mine."<sup>3</sup>

Five years elapsed before the two met again. Utterly

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, pp. 133-4; *Parliamentary History*, xix. 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 183; *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, P. Fitzgerald, ii. 226.

<sup>3</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 224.

dissimilar in tastes and opinions, there was nothing to make them intimate friends. Once more, on the 8th of May, 1781, they dined together with Dilly in the Poultry, the patriot being now Chamberlain of London, and a far less active politician than formerly. Naturally, since it was a subject upon which both could expatiate without danger of altercation, they were soon engaged in chaffing their Scottish friend.

"I have been thinking, Dr. Johnson," began Wilkes mischievously, "that there should be a bill brought into Parliament that the controverted elections for Scotland should be tried in that country at their own Abbey of Holyrood House and not here; for the consequence of trying them here is that we have an inundation of Scotchmen, who come up and never go back again. Now, here is Boswell, who is come up upon the election for his own county, which will not last a fortnight."

"Nay, sir," replied Johnson, "I see no reason why they should be tried at all; for you know one Scotchman is as good as another."

"Pray, Boswell," inquired Wilkes, "how much may be got in a year by an advocate at the Scotch bar?"

"I believe two thousand pounds," answered the barrister.

"How can it be possible," cried Wilkes, "to spend that money in Scotland?"

"Why, sir, the money may be spent in England," returned Johnson, "but there is a harder question. If one man in Scotland gets possession of two thousand pounds, what remains for all the rest of the nation?"

"You know, in the last war," continued Wilkes, "the immense booty which Thurot carried off by the complete plunder of seven Scottish isles; he re-embarked with three and sixpence."<sup>1</sup>

In the course of conversation the patriot uttered two characteristic criticisms. Quotation he censured as pedantry,

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iv. 101.

his own style, both colloquial and literary, being too swift and transparent to admit of interpolation.

"No, sir, it is a good thing," objected Johnson; "there is a community of mind in it. Classical quotation is the parole of literary men all over the world."

"Upon the continent they quote the Vulgate Bible," answered Wilkes, tactfully avoiding argument; "Shakespeare is chiefly quoted here; and we quote also Pope, Prior, Butler, Waller, and sometimes Cowley."<sup>1</sup>

In reference to oratory his opinions were more reactionary. Oratory, he declared, was "accompanied with all the charm of poetical expression," thereby revealing one of the reasons of his own failure as a parliamentary speaker.

"No, sir," replied Johnson, "oratory is the power of beating down your adversary's arguments and putting better in their place."

"But this does not move the passions," retorted Wilkes, with the memory of his achievements as a tub-thumper no doubt in his mind.

"He must be a weak man who is so moved," said Johnson significantly.

Even politics and religion were no longer excluded from their talk. When Wilkes suggested that in case of necessity the House of Commons might order the exportation of specie to the colonies, the doctor did not hesitate to use the obvious *argumentum ad hominem*.

"Sure, sir," he observed, "you don't think a resolution of the House of Commons equal to the law of the land?"

"God forbid, sir," replied Wilkes, remembering the vote that made him an exile for five years.<sup>2</sup>

A little later the patriot remarked how strange it was that an irreligious person like Topham Beauclerk should have had a large collection of sermons in his library.

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iv, 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, iv, 104.

"Why, sir," said Johnson, "you are to consider that sermons make a considerable branch of English literature; so that a library must be very imperfect if it has not a numerous collection of sermons. . . . Besides, sir," he continued, looking at Mr. Wilkes with a placid but significant smile as he spoke, "a man may collect sermons with the intention of making himself better by them. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

And Wilkes, who delighted to brag of his impiety, must have been gratified by the old man's interest in his spiritual welfare.

Apparently each was charmed by the society of the other, and Johnson, at any rate, being incapable of acting a part, must have been sincere. To the delight of Boswell, the sage continued to sit in a favourite attitude, thrust far back into his chair, with Wilkes at his elbow, their heads close together, talking earnestly in a confidential whisper long after the rest of the company had dispersed. Before they separated, Wilkes asked for a present of *The Lives of the Poets*, which Johnson told the bookseller to send with his compliments, and in due course the gift arrived at Prince's Court. Soon afterwards the patriot called upon the doctor to thank him for his kindness, when they had another friendly interview. <sup>2</sup>

Two years later Boswell tried to arrange a fourth meeting, Wilkes being anxious that the lexicographer should dine with him at his home in St. James's Park. Unfortunately Johnson was engaged on the days proposed, and the barrister had to hurry back to Scotland. Even had the guests been available, it is doubtful whether the dinner would have taken place, for Wilkes was attacked by a severe illness, which lasted for more than three weeks. <sup>3</sup>

It is not to be regretted that Wilkes and Johnson met so seldom. Familiarity must have led to a quarrel, for it

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, iv. 105-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iv. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MSS. 30,877, ff. 95-7; *Letters of S. Johnson*, G. B. Hill, ii. 295-6; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 314, 321; *Wilkes's Diary*.

was impossible that they could reconcile their differences for any length of time. The doctor would not tolerate an impious word ; the patriot revelled in facetious stories and mild profanity. That Wilkes had no deep reverence for Johnson is shown by his approval of a spiteful epitaph, written by an egregious scribbler, named Soame Jenyns, long after the great man's death.<sup>1</sup> It was vanity, for the most part, that led him to conquer the aversion of his old foe. Johnson, on the other hand, seems to have found a real pleasure in the society of the member for Middlesex, and the marvellous metamorphosis in their relationship, revealed in the history of their two meetings, is a very high testimony to the charm and versatility of Wilkes.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iv. 28.



CHELSEA PORCELAIN FIGURE OF JOHN WILKES  
*In the British Museum*



## CHAPTER XIX

### LADY FRIENDS

1773-1780

**D**URING the period of his greatest activity in Parliament, Wilkes was enjoying one of the most famous of his amours. The liaison with pretty Mrs. Gardiner had been a brief one, and after a period of vacillation, while he amused himself with the Kitty Towlers and Lucy Ballards whom he met at the supper parties of Miles Andrews, he selected a *maitresse en titre* who was clever enough to retain his favour for four years. It was on the 24th of September 1773, that he saw her first at a dinner in the old Swan Inn in Chelsea, given by the witty voluptuary Chase Price, one of her innumerable patrons.<sup>1</sup> The name of the siren was Marianne Geneviève de Charpillon, a Parisian of Swiss origin, who, although apt to underrate her age after the manner of her kind, had already passed her thirtieth birthday.<sup>2</sup> Time had been lenient to her charms in spite of her riotous past, and Wilkes, ever an admirer of the ladies of France, was bewitched by her blandishments.

Mademoiselle Charpillon was a very handsome woman. With soft blue eyes and a wealth of chestnut hair, her beauty belonged to the Gretchen type, the gift of her Helvetian ancestry. Tall and shapely, with delicate hands and tiny feet, there was grace and elasticity in all her movements. An expression of sincerity rested upon her dainty features,

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Diary*. *Vide* Add. MSS. 30,866; *cf.* Add. MS. 30,880 A, Letter of Feb. 7, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes's *List of Addresses*. *Vide* Add. MS. 30,892.



inviting the sympathy of all with its naïve, childlike innocence. It was a sweet, alluring face, pink and white and piquant, and the licentious Wilkes, who did not insist that a mistress should be in the first bloom of youth, began immediately to pay court to her.<sup>1</sup>

At this period she was living in Black and White Lands Lane at Chelsea, with her grandmother, her mother, and an aunt.<sup>2</sup> The history of the family had been a tempestuous one, all three generations having been courtesans. The old lady, under the name of Brunner, had attained some notoriety in her youth as a second-rate meretrix in Berne, where the mother of Marianne was born, one of three illegitimate daughters. Even less successful than their parent, the girls never found any more eminent clients than grooms and footmen, leading a hazardous existence in low-class bagnios, until, luckily for themselves, the whole family was banished from the country by the Swiss government. Eventually, under an assumed name, they drifted to Paris, where for a time they enjoyed considerable prosperity, being patronised by men of rank and position. Here, about the year 1740, Rose Charpillon, the youngest of the three girls, gave birth to Marianne, and after a futile attempt to prove that the baby was the daughter of the Imperial Ambassador, the family was obliged to allow that her real father was a Jew bourgeois.<sup>3</sup> When scarcely more than a child, her mother and grandmother, seeking the best market for their goods, emigrated with her to London.

While never reaching the first rank amongst "Covent Garden Ladies," Marianne Charpillon did not lack admirers.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires de J. Casanova* (Garnier), vi. 485; *Mémoires de J. Casanova* (Rozez), vi. 7. For the proofs that identify the Charpillon of Wilkes with the Charpillon of Casanova, see Author's note in *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, iv. 382, 461; v. 484; *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes's *List of Addresses*. *Vide* Add. MS. 30,892.

<sup>3</sup> *Mémoires de Casanova* (Garnier), vi. 513; information supplied by M. Ch. Samaran, of the *Archives Nationales* in Paris. Cf. *Jacques Casanova*, Ch. Samaran, pp. 270-82.

Probably, but for the presence of squalid relatives, she might have become a queen of the *demi-monde*. Yet, in spite of a mediocre career, her posthumous fame has exceeded that of almost any of her kind. It was to a curious incident that she owes this celebrity. In January 1764, while living with her unsavoury kinsfolk in Denmark Street, St. Giles's,<sup>1</sup> she made the acquaintance of an Italian adventurer, named Giacomo Casanova, who had come to England to seek his fortune. A black and virile creature, fierce as the sun of his native land, he was unused to place any curb upon his passions, and as soon as his restless eyes beheld the radiant face of Marianne Charpillon he pursued her like a satyr. The girl's dignity was offended, for she was not without strength of character, and had an exalted opinion of her own worth. Deeply incensed by the unmannerly wooing of the stranger, she resolved to teach him a bitter lesson. Time after time she accepted his money and arranged a rendezvous, but when the meeting took place she refused to gratify his desires.

Invariably successful in his amours, Casanova was provoked beyond endurance by this obduracy. Racked by the torments of Tantalus, he lost all self-control and menaced the scornful beauty with his cane. Driven into the street in night attire to avoid corporal punishment, the indignant Marianne took a swift revenge. Lodging a complaint at Bow Street, she procured the arrest of her persecutor on the ground that he had threatened her with violence. Although the Italian had little difficulty in persuading Sir John Fielding to grant his release, the adventure seems to have rankled in his mind more than any misfortune in his stormy career. For he had been deeply in love with the fair Charpillon, and was sorely hurt because she treated him with disdain. Thirty-five years later, when the old libertine was composing his wonderful memoirs, the blue eyes of the beautiful girl still haunted

<sup>1</sup> Holborn Rate Books for 1764.

him, and he told the story of his humiliation in a spirit of fierce resentment. Among all the men and women depicted in these lurid pages, La Charpillon remains the most vivid and memorable—a bright, implacable coquette with a child's face and a heart of steel. As long as the memoirs of Casanova are read she will not be forgotten.<sup>1</sup>

Bound by a strong family tie, which is an excellent trait in her character, Marianne behaved with admirable generosity towards her people, willing to share with them at all times. Her mother, more than forty years of age when Casanova came to England, was a greater burden even than the old grandmother, becoming soon a chronic invalid, but her Aunt Julie succeeded in earning a small income by the sale of a quack medicine, which she called "le baume de vie," alleging that it was the true elixir of life.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally Marianne captivated a rich gallant, like Thomas Panton of turf fame and brother of the Duchess of Ancaster, who for her sake seems to have deserted such a powerful enchantress as "the luscious" Mrs. Garnier.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, however, the Charpillon family were in an impecunious state, and the capture of the famous demagogue was a lucky event.<sup>4</sup>

Always lavish in his dealings with a woman, Wilkes spared no expense to win the approval of the capricious courtesan. Soon after their first meeting, it was arranged that the whole family should remove to a more commodious house in Great Titchfield Street, where they took up their

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires de Casanova* (Garnier), vi. chaps. 14, 15, and 16; *Mémoires de Casanova* (Rozez), vi. chaps. 1 and 2. Although Casanova was in England during the latter half of the year 1763, when the whole nation was talking of Wilkes, he does not mention the patriot's name. In later years it is not improbable that he learnt of the connection between Wilkes and Mlle. Charpillon.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires de Casanova* (Garnier), vi. 490, 493, 499; Add. MS. 30,880 A, ff. 94, 98, 103; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 50, iv. 57, 142, 169; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 279.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 A, f. 131; cf. *Town and Country Magazine*, I. 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, ii. 386; iii. 242; v. 484.

abode on the 1st of November; when, since it was Marianne's birthday, a festive little dinner party was given by the amorous alderman in honour of his inamorata.<sup>1</sup> In addition to monetary contributions he sent periodical gifts of food and wine, also, when his finances permitted, rich presents of gowns and millinery.<sup>2</sup> Ever since his matrimonial fiasco he had hoped to meet a woman who might take the place of a wife, and at last he seemed to have found his affinity.

For more than four years Marianne managed to retain his fealty. With the passing of youth she had learnt the need of tact, while repeated misfortunes showed her the folly of being too exacting. Even had her temperament been unchanged since the days when she had tormented Casanova, she realised full well that in John Wilkes she was dealing with a stronger and cleverer man. Judging his disposition with charming art, her attitude towards him was all gentleness and humility, and the stubborn egotist, enchanted by her dainty foreign accent and coaxing smiles, indulged her like a spoilt child, unaware that she ruled him in all things. Whenever he tried to scold, she would lay her hand upon his lips, begging him not to make "the mouth of an elephant."<sup>3</sup>

If a week should pass without a visit from her paramour, she wrote him a letter in her quaint orthography, chiding him for his negligence or reproaching him for making her unhappy, knowing that he was vastly amused by these naïve, illiterate scrawls. Sometimes she sought to awaken his ardour by playful suggestiveness. "C'est avec impatience que j'aten le mois de Novembre," she informed him on the 1st of August, "puisque cela me fait espérer que vous ne serée pas si paraisseur que dans le grande

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Diary* of Nov. 1, 1773; Wilkes's *List of Addresses*. *Vide* Add. MS. 30,892; Marylebone Rate Books.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 A., *passim*; *Morning Post*, July 4, 1777.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 A., ff. 46, 77.

chaleur." In like manner, when asking for a loan, she knew how to charm away his displeasure. "Si par hasar," she insinuated, "vous est tourmentée par loisivetée se soir, venée pour vous disipée avec moy."<sup>1</sup>

In almost every letter that she wrote there is evidence of the skill with which she kept him in control. For Wilkes was always a restive lover, and had to be driven with silken reins. By pretending implicit obedience, she managed to get her own way in most things. Knowing his appetite for flattery, she professed the most profound admiration for his character, and never failed to repeat every little incident that would tickle his vanity. "J'ai été hyar au bal maskée," she told him after one of their tiffs, "le plaisir seul que j'ai eut vous en étiée l'auteur, ce qu'il vous paroîtera une énigme, mais le raison est toute claire, il y avait un Mr. que avoit écri sur son chapo Wilkes and liberta. Il a très bien jouée ce rolle il a contée a la campagni que les drois de ce pay étois perdu si vous n'étiée pas élue, et vous étiée san tache et une infinitée dautre circumstance . . . . vous pouvée facilemen pansée, que toute ses bonne raison non pas l'essée que de me flatée l'oreillie, qui enten ce qui vous regard pàr les autre."<sup>2</sup> Probably Wilkes imagined that he had accomplished a successful taming of the shrew, whereas in reality La Charpillon was his mistress in every sense of the word.

It was part of her policy to feign a great interest in the daughter of her protector, "une demoiselle si accompli et si perfectionnée." Miss Polly also, ignorant of nothing that concerned her father, was quite aware of Marianne's existence, and Wilkes, most brazen of libertines, entrusted her on one occasion with a commission for his mistress.<sup>3</sup> Although he never allowed them to meet, he did not attempt to prevent them from exchanging compliments. "Made-

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 A, ff. 58, 62.

Add. MS. 30,880 A, f. 106.

*Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 34.

moiselle Wilkes ma fait l'honneur ce matin de me faire demendée l'état de ma santé," Marianne wrote to her protector during the year of his mayoralty, "je suis for sensible a la politesse de My Lady Mayor."<sup>1</sup>

Similar motives led her to make a pet of Jack Smith, whose fondness for French people and French ways created a bond of sympathy between them. With a strange lack of discretion, Wilkes encouraged the intimacy, and during the two years that his son remained in London he took him frequently to dine at No. 30 Great Titchfield Street. Jack was a droll, lovable boy, with a large share of hereditary humour, but proved a sad disappointment to his father. Being unable to adapt himself to English ways after his long residence in Paris, he made no progress in his education, except, thanks to the tuition of Angelo, in the matter of horsemanship. At last, in the summer of 1776, weary of his peccadilloes, for he proved a sad pickle, Wilkes sent him over to Germany with the idea of allowing him to enter the Hessian cavalry as soon as he had learnt the language. It was stipulated, however, that he should not serve against the American colonists.<sup>2</sup>

One Sunday evening, while Wilkes was taking supper at Great Titchfield Street, ten months after the departure of Jack Smith, the first serious quarrel took place between Marianne and himself. In a sudden pique the nature of the gutter-child revealed itself, and she scolded him like a street-walker. Since his affections were beginning to wane, Wilkes was glad of an excuse to terminate the liaison, for he was deep in debt, and Miss Charpillon was an expensive luxury. On the following morning

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 A, ff. 24, 26, 35, 120; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkes's *Diary*, 1774-6; *Vide* Add. MSS. 30,866; *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 111; *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 41, 42; *History of Isle of Wight*, W. H. Davenport Adams, p. 203; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 167, 168, 169, 248, 252, 275; v. 117-122; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 23, 29, 45; Add. MSS. 30,872, ff. 62, 116.

he sent a letter to bid her farewell, determined to see her no more :

“*MADemoisELLE*,—Les dernières paroles que vous m’avez fait l’honneur de me dire étoient, ‘Monsieur, vous mêtes devenu aussi odieux que ma Mere!’ Vous savez, ce qui est arrivé dimanche au soir.

La plainte est pour le fat,  
Le bruit est pour le sot,  
L’honnête homme trompé  
S’éloigne et ne dit mot.

Adieu.”<sup>1</sup>

Though he did not keep this stern resolve, his connection with Marianne soon came to an end. After a suitable apology she received his forgiveness, and they met occasionally, while Wilkes sometimes sent her presents of wine or flowers. But her power over him was gone. Financial worries, an election for the Chamberlainship, and frequent absence from London all in turn served to keep him from her side. Before November they had drifted entirely apart. For some weeks *Mademoiselle Charpillon* had been incapacitated with a scalded foot, and when able at last to leave her couch she found that the fickle lover was beyond her reach.<sup>2</sup> Under the circumstances her reign had been of more than usual duration. It was her art, not mutual sympathy, that had bound them together, and it was impossible that two masterful temperaments such as theirs could blend for long.

In a little while Wilkes had found a younger and more tranquil companion, Amelia Arnold by name, country-bred and economical—a plain, homely creature, happy to wait on him hand and foot, and obedient as a slave. There was no formal parting with Marianne, and he bore no rancour against her, taking note of each new address for many years, whenever she changed her abode, in case he might wish to

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 A, f. 101; cf. *Wilkes's Diary*, May 11, 1777.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 A, ff. 102-112; cf. *Wilkes's Diary*.

renew their friendship. It was seldom, however, that he had need to pick up the threads of the past. Each month, almost, of his adventurous life led him upon a fresh trail. Scarcely had he turned his back upon the piquant face of Mademoiselle Charpillon than he was entangled in a fresh amour, the most remarkable perhaps in which he had ever engaged. Compared with this new intrigue, the affair with Miss Arnold, which took place at the same time, was a casual incident.

It was during a visit to Bath, where he spent the Christmas holidays, that this incorrigible libertine fell in love once more. The name of the lady was Maria Stafford, wife of William Stafford, of The Holt, near Wokingham, and a woman of position, whom he met at a dinner-party on the 10th of January, 1778, at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton in Russell Street.<sup>1</sup> Cultured and clever, with much of the blue-stocking in her disposition, she was flattered by the homage of the popular hero, and behaved to him with delightful complaisance. Enchanted by her bright glance and lively prattle, Wilkes began to entertain most tender aspirations, his passion being inflamed by the knowledge that she was, living apart from a faithless husband. In comparison with this serene and gracious gentlewoman, the humble Amelia and the artful Marianne both seemed vulgar and commonplace. All the evening he remained by her side, making love to her with audacious persistency, overjoyed to find that she was pleased to listen to all that he had to tell her.

Four days later business summoned him to town, but before setting out he left a card at her house, which called forth a grateful little note to say that she would be "truly glad to see him" whenever he returned to Bath. Encouraged by this good omen, Wilkes replied in a voluminous

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Diary*; *Vide* Add. MSS. 30,866; Add. MS. 30,880 B, f. 61; cf. Will of William Stafford, proved Sept. 7, 1796; *European Magazine*, xxx. 230.



letter as soon as he reached home, a tentative though amatory epistle, for he was wise enough to make a reconnoitre before venturing upon a decisive attack. Receiving no answer, he expressed himself more passionately in a second communication a fortnight later.<sup>1</sup> The lady was alarmed. Being an amiable coquette, she was willing to enjoy all the adulation that a beautiful and lonely woman is able to command, but in the present instance she perceived that it had been imprudent to give too much encouragement to such a pertinacious admirer. So she wrote a cautious though amicable reply, quoting a paragraph in praise of "discretion" from a book that he had given to her, and telling him that in consequence of her "situation" she dared not continue the correspondence.

In his next letter Wilkes implored her to revoke this stern decision. "I approve *discretion*, but would not let it run away with my happiness," he declared. "Have I given any such lesson in any book? I should be like the eagle," he added, using a poetic image that has since been preserved in immortal verse, "which was killed by an arrow feathered from his own wing."<sup>2</sup> Glad enough to flirt if she could keep her gallant under proper control, Mrs. Stafford sent an answer by return of post, acknowledging that she wished to be his friend, but reiterating her determination not to write or receive letters. Yet, with artful coquetry, she replied to another importunate appeal a few days later, assuring him once more that she was looking forward to his return to Bath.<sup>3</sup>

On the 25th of February Wilkes revealed his intentions, which indeed the lady must have understood from the first; though confident in her power of resistance, she wished to enjoy the pleasure of being wooed by her impetuous lover. "Make me YOUR *protector*," he pleaded; "I have a happier

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 B, ff. 61-3. The whole correspondence of Wilkes and Mrs. Stafford, a most amusing series of letters, is contained in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B, ff. 63-4.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B, ff. 65-7.

lot than Cromwell. I dare not be more explicit, and I trust I need not. . . . A beautiful Ionic column is in no small danger single and unconnected, but forms the best part of an elegant building. . . . A *deserted* state is unnatural to a woman, formed by all the virtues and graces to enjoy life and inspire the most exquisite *happiness*. . . . You say my *best wishes* are always yours. Do you really, then, wish me the best thing on earth? The object of all my fond wishes. Do you wish me yourself? ”<sup>1</sup>

Once more by return of post the provoking young woman despatched her reply, a calm, dispassionate analysis of their mutual relationship, composed with evident care, in which she reminded him that matrimony was impossible, Platonism ridiculous, while “the bare idea of any connection less durable and innocent ” had “something in it too horrible even to be hinted at.”<sup>2</sup>

Aware that his coquettish blue-stocking regarded freedom of speech on the part of a man as an acknowledgment of her intellectual equality, Wilkes had no fear of offending her by audacity. Accustomed to success in all his gallantries, it was not his habit to show a faint heart in addressing a fair lady. The composition of two important speeches and other political business occupied his attention for a fortnight, after which he returned to his wooing with fresh ardour. “I am satisfied that you are perfectly well read in the history of England,” he wrote to her on the 14th of March. “We all agree that James II *abdicated* and *deserted*, and that the throne thereby became vacant. I say that Mr. Stafford *abdicated* and *deserted*, and the throne of love is thereby become vacant. What was the next step of the people of England? They filled the *vacant throne* with that hero of liberty, the Prince of Orange, and all Europe applauded. The public prints say that the Assembly of North Carolina have passed an Act for creating a county in that province to be called ‘Wilkes’s County.’ I would exchange that

<sup>1</sup> Add, MS. 30,880 B, ff. 67-8.

<sup>2</sup> Add, MS. 30,880 B, ff. 69-70.

whole county for the *property* . . . which Mr. Stafford *abdicated* and *deserted*. It cannot therefore be any longer his in conscience or honour." In conclusion, he assured her that he was coming early in April to lay siege to the deserted home, which her husband had ceased to value.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Stafford was not in the least offended by this freedom of speech. With a child's delight in playing with fire, she revelled in the feverish experience. Still, she had no intention to indulge her passions, though possibly as amorous as he, realising that, even when no less willing than her pursuer, a woman has need to hesitate because she invariably will have to pay a heavier penalty. But she continued to tantalise him by letter, misinterpreting his compliments, scolding him mildly for sending presents, serene and confident in the midst of the most ardent philandering. Unhappily, she overrated her power of resistance. Wilkes now called her by her Christian name. Certain of success, he made arrangements to pay a visit to Bath during the Easter recess, even naming the time that he would call upon her. For a little while still she sought to keep him at bay, threatening at first that a previous engagement would take her into the country, then pleading a cold, and finally informing him that her doors could only be open to him "when they were so to *toute le monde*." Deaf to every excuse, he left London at seven o'clock on the appointed day, and, reaching Marlborough the same night, arrived in Bath on the following afternoon. After being baffled more than once, for she continued to be coy, he succeeded in obtaining an interview with his "dear, adorable Maria" on the next morning.<sup>2</sup>

No incident in the life of Wilkes reveals his ruthlessness towards women more conspicuously than his pursuit of Mrs. Stafford, or in such a cruel shape. Unlike most of the

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B, f. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B, ff. 74-9; Wilkes's *Diary*, April 12, 1778; *Vide* Add. MS. 30,866; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 77, 80.

objects of his lust, she was a blameless lady, whose reputation hitherto had been above reproach, in a position of life also that made the favour he demanded a monstrous sacrifice. A liaison with him would bring social ruin, while the generous alimony that she had received from her husband would cease immediately.<sup>1</sup> In return he could offer no equivalent, being unable to provide her with an adequate establishment, and it was impossible for her to live under the same roof as his own daughter. By becoming his mistress she would have to surrender all that she had in the world in exchange for his doubtful allegiance.

The first *tête-à-tête*, albeit "the most refined delicacy was observed on her side," inspired him with confidence. After having reiterated a score of times that she would never consent to a clandestine interview, she had consented. Though hitherto she had declined to receive presents she accepted a bouquet of roses, and requested him to frank a letter for her. Two evenings later they met at the concert, where his compliments did not offend her, and she talked freely of her matrimonial misfortunes. Believing that he could read her character, he was sure that his plan of seduction must succeed. "The fire of those eyes told me," he confessed in a subsequent letter, "that the powers of nature were transcendent but not yet called forth, and in that manner I accounted for everything in your history." Perceiving that the flirtation gave her pleasure, he was convinced that he would succeed in capturing the vacant throne which the ignoble Stafford had abdicated. The next morning he left a bouquet of violets at her house, and sent another ticket for a concert. It was suggested too that they should meet at a ball. It was obvious that she was wavering.<sup>2</sup>

Happily for the "adorable Maria," a lucky chance prevented her from committing more serious folly. One of her best friends, a masterful dame who had been her

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B, f. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 B, ff. 79-81.

confidant and adviser for many years, happened to call on this momentous Thursday morning, and saw the bouquet and concert ticket lying upon the table. Somewhat surprised, she asked the name of the person who sent them. Mrs. Stafford refused to answer. Suspecting a secret admirer, the friend proceeded to cross-examine the servants and so discovered the truth. The good woman was aghast. Realising the serious peril in which her dear Maria was likely to be involved, she insisted upon hearing the whole history of her acquaintance with the wicked Mr. Wilkes. Unable to resist the other's strength of will, the unhappy Mrs. Stafford made a full confession, receiving in return the most excellent advice. The correspondence with the dangerous libertine was to cease; no more of his presents, in any shape or form, were to be accepted; he was not to be allowed to visit her again; the letters on both sides were to be returned. Wholly penitent now that she understood the enormity of her indiscretion, Mrs. Stafford proceeded to write a farewell letter to inform Wilkes of this stern decision.<sup>1</sup>

He was deeply distressed. In a despondent reply, he pictured himself "sitting up all night in an elbow chair before the fire composing melancholy verses," oblivious entirely to the humour of such a spectacle—an elderly gentleman of fifty-three in dressing-gown and slippers sighing like a furnace for a lady as young as his own daughter. Of the interloper it was hard for him to speak in measured language—"your female friend" he called her—and he conjured up the vision of a jealous virago whose *métier* it was to prevent the pretty ones of her sex from enjoying the admiration to which they were entitled. Professing to obey her commands, he continued to assail her nevertheless with importunate letters. "I will never cease to love you with ardour," he avowed, "although you shall restrain it as you please, and the rest I leave to heaven." Possibly the picture of her wizened old lover in his lonely vigil over

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS, 30,880 B, ff. 82-90.

the fire awakened her pity, for she wrote to him no less than three times during the next week, and, while stipulating that correspondence and *tête-à-têtes* must cease, she held out hopes that they might see each other occasionally in public places. A severe cold, however, followed by wintry weather, kept Mrs. Stafford a prisoner in the house for several days, and Wilkes was obliged to leave Bath without seeing her again.<sup>1</sup>

It was the end of their amour. On his return to town he had to make a pretence of fulfilling his promise to send back her letters, but he only surrendered three of them, for his replies were written on all the rest, and he did not wish her to know that he had kept copies.<sup>2</sup> With wonted patience he waited in silence for nine months, receiving no tidings of her meanwhile, but still living in hope that she would relent. Coming again to Bath in December to spend Christmas, he learnt the sad news that she had left the town, and that her residence was for sale. On pretence of viewing the furniture he paid a visit to the empty house. "I sat half an hour in your chair," he wrote to tell her a few days later, "I had a groupe of ideas I dare not express. I was in your bed-chamber, but hurried away from a scene too luxurious for a warm imagination."<sup>3</sup> All his blandishments were in vain. Anxious to become reconciled to Mr. Stafford, "the adorable Maria" was careful to run no risks. A few months later husband and wife were living together once more.

Very wisely Wilkes showed neither vexation nor despair, although the lady, having wit and intelligence as well as beauty, perhaps had stirred his heart more deeply than any woman he had ever known. Because he had failed to win her love, he saw no reason why he should not enjoy her

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 B, ff. 83-9; Wilkes's *Diary*, April 12-May 2, 1778; *Vide* Add. MSS. 30,866; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 85-95; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 268, 284.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B, f. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B, f. 93.

friendship; an occasional flirtation also seeming highly probable. At the end of the year, while travelling to Bath as usual for the Christmas holidays, he stayed for the night at Salt Hill for the purpose of paying a visit to The Holt, so that he might make the acquaintance of Mr. Stafford. Naturally he was not favourably impressed, dubbing him "her puppy of a husband," though glad to find that he was a Wilkite. "She behaved with grace, elegance and ease," he wrote to his daughter the same evening; "he with awkwardness and absurdity . . . Her character is exceptional, and she has great sense and wit . . . Mrs. Stafford read with hesitation Lord Kelly's letter. I was surprised at her decyphering it so quick. . . . She laughingly asked me what salary I would give her to be secretary to the Chamberlain. I said, 'You may name your own terms. I have only one condition to insist on, your constant residence.'"<sup>1</sup>

Evidently the old rascal was encouraged by her complaisance to take further liberties, for when writing to her from Bath two days later he forwarded at the same time a ribald French poem. "Mr. Wilkes dares not send the enclosed very witty, but too gay, verses to Mrs. Stafford," he explained, though there was no reason at all to enter into details. "He therefore seals them up for Mr. Stafford, who will, he believes, be much pleased with them. They are just arrived from France." Knowing the disposition of the lady, no doubt he felt very sure that she would insist upon reading the enclosure.<sup>2</sup>

For many years "the amiable and lovely Mrs. Stafford," as well as "her puppy of a husband," remained on the most cordial terms with John Wilkes. Gratified by the esteem of a famous man for whose achievements she had a profound respect, although a loyal Tory, she took infinite care

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 176-7; Add. MSS. 30,880 B., ff. 94-7.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B., f. 98.

to retain his friendship, but, taught wisdom by her dangerous escapade, she would never allow him the slightest licence. In the matter of presents, too, she was strangely punctilious, returning every one of the costly things that he insisted upon buying for her from time to time, greatly to his chagrin, but making him happy occasionally by sending him some little gift which she had worked with her own hands. Whether she grieved him or whether she pleased him, Wilkes continued to be her ardent admirer, never fearing to speak openly of his admiration, but careful to allow her to prescribe the limits of their intercourse, much afraid of forfeiting her good opinion. It was a Platonic flirtation of the most harmless kind. On many occasions Mr. and Mrs. Stafford entertained the Chamberlain at The Holt on his journeys to the west, while he often visited them in Bath, and dined with them at their town house in New Norfolk Street. They also were frequent guests at Prince's Court, where the incomparable Polly was a most cordial hostess, well aware of her father's attachment to the beautiful lady.<sup>1</sup> Of his innumerable amours, no other perhaps had so agreeable a *dénouement*, in spite of its ominous commencement. Having failed to win a woman as a mistress, it was seldom that he was content to keep her as a friend.

In the midst of his first bitter disappointment, when he returned from Bath after his visit to Mrs. Stafford's empty home, and realised that his hopes would never be fulfilled, Wilkes sought consolation immediately with his usual versatility in the smiles of a new innamorata. The name of the young person was Jenny Wade, a frail adventuress, who, lodging at No. 8 Prince's Court, was for the moment his next-door neighbour. For several months they met frequently in *maisons de rendezvous*, such as Mrs.

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 B., ff. 98-114; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 176, 182, 205, 222, 224, 256, 257; iii. 14, 15, 17, 321; *Wilkes's Diary*, vide Add. MSS. 30,866.



Muilman's, off the Strand, and Mrs. Nelson's, in Wardour Street. Encouraged by his professions of regard, the pretty courtesan seems to have expected that he would provide her with an establishment, endeavouring with some craft to play off a certain Mr. Paul against him. Afraid of the expense of such monopoly, Wilkes preferred to risk the chance of competition, Miss Jenny having shown clearly that she could run into debt as heedlessly as any woman of the town. So their friendship continued to be a periodical one, enduring from first to last for the space of a year, far more than the average length of most of his promiscuous love affairs, and although showing much fondness for her whenever they met, he does not seem to have been distressed when they parted for the last time.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile he was growing more attached to the placid Amelia Arnold, who had borne him a daughter. Always fond of children, the improvident Wilkes was not in the least dismayed by the arrival of a new dependent, and the little girl being very pretty made herself the pet and tyrant of his old age. When his election as Chamberlain had given him an assured income, he provided his mistress with a liliputian home in a small row of houses at Kensington Gore, facing the high road opposite to Prince's Gate, where the charming Harriet would have the advantage of country air. Here he was a constant visitor, especially when Polly Wilkes was away from home, and here he gave dinner parties occasionally to privileged friends, bringing servants from Prince's Court to wait at table. There were six long windows in the small parlour, and mirrors lined the walls everywhere throughout the house, for its owner loved a bright, light room, both in the day-time and when the shutters were drawn.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,880 A., *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Old Court Suburb*, Leigh Hunt, pp. 22-36; *Life and Times of F. Reynolds*, i. 20; *Mems. of T. A. Hayley*, p. 150; *Diary of Crabb Robinson* i. 300; *Old and New London*, v. 122; *Wilkes's Diary*, *vide* Add. MSS. 30,866; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 91-6, 140.

Never beautiful, Amelia Arnold became quite plain when the freshness of youth had vanished. Yet Wilkes's devotion to her remained unchanged, justifying his boast that he would have been "a uxorious husband" if married to a sympathetic wife. Whenever convenient, he was delighted to take her with him on a holiday tour. To her little circle of humble friends he was kind and generous. On more than one occasion late in life he paid a visit to the Isle of Wight with his middle-aged mistress and two of her elderly gossips. Once a ribald newspaper made a coarse allusion to her plainness.

"You see, my dear," he observed with a wit and tenderness that fully consoled the poor woman, "there has never been *any difference* between us."<sup>1</sup>

A week seldom passed without one of "the usual peregrinations to Kensington Gore." And, while living there, he was in the habit of walking to and from the Guildhall in all weathers, as he did at home, somewhat bent by the weight of years, but shuffling along with quick impatient strides, paying no heed to the solicitations of the hackney coachmen in the Knightsbridge Road, who at the sight of the tall, slender figure in the cocked hat, scarlet coat and military boots, vociferated incessantly, "A coach, your honour."<sup>2</sup>

Such were the principal amours of John Wilkes after he had passed his fiftieth year. Although the category of his moral misdeeds is by no means exhausted, the character of the rest is pretty much the same. Like most of the men of his time, he lived in open polygamy, rather more heedlessly and ostentatiously than the majority, but transgressing no more often than many who have been regarded both by posterity and by their contemporaries as far superior in Christian virtue. Still, it is not remarkable

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Times of F. Reynolds*, ii. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Recollections of J. O'Keeffe*, i. 108; *Old Court Suburb*, Leigh Hunt, p. 37; *Table Talk of S. Rogers* (A. Dyce), p. 43.

that he earned the reputation of being the worst of profligates, nor was the character altogether ill-deserved. The attempt upon the chastity of Maria Stafford shows that there is no inherent improbability in Horace Walpole's story of his seduction of "a maiden of family." Owing to the frequent ribaldry of his conversation, he appeared to revel in libertinism, and many of his friends and all his foes, witnessing his numerous gallantries, actually believed that he would "debauch" any daughter of theirs, as Dr. Johnson had foretold, if he had the opportunity.

There was some truth certainly, but a great deal of falsity also, in this opinion. Like all accomplished rakes, Wilkes did not begin a courtship if there was no prospect of success, never taking a liberty until he had received encouragement. The most chaste of damsels was safe in his company, unless she gave him a false impression of her character. It was her own fault if she had to complain of his behaviour. To many a charming girl, like Elizabeth Linley or Julia Brereton or the pretty Misses Molineux, he was the kindest of friends, receiving in return a warmth of affection that the nearest of relations would have been glad to inspire. The defamers of Wilkes were apt to forget that a man cannot be wicked if a woman says nay.

Much of the evil that was told of him was obviously the invention of the enemy. To an indignant Tory any stick seemed good enough to beat "the blasphemer of his God and the libeller of his king." Since he took a mischievous delight in shocking his opponents by exaggerating his depravity, he played a considerable part also in his own defamation. No devil could have been so black as he was painted by those who wished to besmirch him. It would not have been strange if the phrase "as wicked as Wilkes" had passed into a proverb.

It is a common plea that the men who have lived in an age of lax morality should not be judged by the standard of a more virtuous era. The Christian code, established for

all time, can accept no such extenuation. Yet, this attitude is hardly reasonable, since the existence of a low state of morals must indicate that Christian precepts have failed to impress the popular mind. Although Wilkes adopted a new mistress almost as often as he bought a new suit of clothes, the bishops did not refuse to dine with him, and many a good clergyman was proud to be reckoned his friend. The sentiment of the Georgian period, which sanctioned the butcheries of Tyburn, was more than tolerant to a breach of the seventh commandment. While it is usual to praise those who are in advance of the spirit of their age, it seems unjust to condemn those who are content merely to keep pace with it. Wilkes was no better, and very little worse, than the average politician of his time, and, such as he was, he thoroughly deserves the opprobrium of a less robust and more hypocritical epoch.

## CHAPTER XX

### AN EXHAUSTED VOLCANO

1780-1788

**I**N the summer that followed the melancholy visit to Bath, when Wilkes had sat and sighed in Mrs. Stafford's empty home, he was once more in the midst of a political tumult that affected his reputation more considerably than any event since his release from prison. After having caused the rising of a hundred mobs, he was obliged at last to take his share in quelling the fiercest riot that the capital had ever seen. A woeful object-lesson showed him the fallacy of the convenient doctrine that "the voice of the people is the voice of God." For the first time since the accession of George the Third, he found himself on the side of the Government. It was the outbreak of the Gordon Riots that caused this remarkable tergiversation, and he played his new role as resolutely as he had played the demagogue.

One of the periodical epidemics of religious intolerance had swept over the kingdom. All the legions of rabid Protestantism were ablaze with wrath because Parliament had put an end to the persecution of Catholics by allowing them the right to worship in their own faith and by removing the penalties under which their property had been liable to forfeiture. With Lord George Gordon as their hysterical leader, the most combative of the fanatics began a fierce agitation against "Popery," and it was resolved that a procession of twenty thousand malcontents should march to St. Stephen's with a petition for the repeal of the Relief Act. On the appointed day a turbulent mob, three times

as large as was expected, surged around the walls of Westminster Palace. The demonstration speedily became a riot. Maddened by religious bigotry the crowd was determined that Parliament should obey its commands. Every member, as he made his way through Palace Yard, was obliged to assume the blue cockade, and to promise that he would vote for the repeal of the obnoxious laws. All who were suspected of sympathising with the Catholics were seized and beaten, some of them being grievously hurt before they could be rescued. With wild shouts of "No Popery," a multitude forced its way into the lobbies, where Lord George Gordon addressed them in an incendiary speech, denouncing his fellow-members as the emissaries of Rome. For several hours both the Lords and the Commons were kept prisoners in their respective Houses, waiting, sword in hand, for the onslaught of the rioters, who were expected every moment to burst through the locked doors. It was not until the arrival of the Guards that Parliament was rescued from its humiliating position, when the mob withdrew without any attempt at resistance, manifesting its zeal for the Protestant faith by burning two Catholic chapels near Golden Square and Lincoln's Inn Fields before it dispersed into the slums.<sup>1</sup>

During the next forty-eight hours the town remained quiet, but on Sunday night the storm broke out afresh in the district of Moorfields, where there was a large colony of Catholics. The streets began to resound with the clatter

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the Gordon Riots, see *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), i. 231-47; *Journal of Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, ii. 403-10; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), xi. 187-215, 220, 222-3; *Letters of Lord Malmesbury*, i. 261-5; *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), ii. 111-17; *Narrative of the Late Disturbances*, Wm. Vincent; *History of London*, B. Lambert, ii. 261-72; *Gentleman's Magazine*, l. 267-8, 312-16, 367-9; *Annual Register* (1780), 271-87; *Pictorial History of England*, G. L. Craik, v. 411-17; *History of England*, W. E. Lecky, iii. 509-22; *Life of George the Third*, J. H. Jesse, ii. 261-86; *Parliamentary History*, xxi. 664, 669; *Barnaby Rudge*, Charles Dickens; *Public Advertiser*, June 1780.

of hurrying footsteps, which gradually swelled into the dull, heavy tread of a vast multitude. An angry roar of "No Popery" rose incessantly from ten thousand throats. Like a pack of hungry wolves, the savage rabble had come to hunt down its prey. Soon there was the sharp crackle of fire, and the flames of another burning chapel leapt into the still summer air. Hither and thither, with cheers and curses, the relentless fanatics hurried along on their work of destruction, sacking every house that was known to be the habitation of a Catholic.

On the morrow, when the king's birthday should have been celebrated, the metropolis was in the hands of the mob. Since the memory of the Wilkes riots was still vivid, the magistrates, as well as the military, were chary of using force, fearing that if lives should be lost they might have to stand a trial for murder before a prejudiced jury. Beyond the arrest of a few of the insurgents, the authorities made no serious attempt to suppress the disturbance. Of all the city magistrates, John Wilkes was the foremost disciple of the gospel of "thorough," urging the Lord Mayor to raise the *posse comitatus* without delay, while he declared that if he had the power he "would not leave a rioter alive." It was said appropriately by a critical foe "that he who raised mobs could not be afraid to quell them."<sup>1</sup>

For three days and three nights fire and slaughter raged through the city. What had been at first a mere outbreak of religious intolerance was changed into a formidable rebellion. Most of the criminal classes joined in the riot, revelling in the facility for pillage. From venting their rage upon the Catholics, the insurgents began to wreak their vengeance upon their rulers. Many attempts were made to storm the Parliament House, the rioters being kept at bay by the troops of soldiers that blocked every approach

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Diary*, *vide* Add. MSS. 30,866; *Letters of S. Johnson*, G. B. Hill, ii. 174-5; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 212. For the conduct of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen during the riots, see *London and the Kingdom*, R. R. Sharpe, iii. 179-86, 190.

to Westminster Palace. The house of Justice Hyde, who had been active in opposing the mob, was levelled to the ground, and that of Sir John Fielding was wrecked and plundered. The contents of Lord Mansfield's residence in Bloomsbury Square, including a valuable collection of books and a number of priceless manuscripts, were utterly destroyed, while the venerable judge himself nearly fell a victim to the vandals when the sack of his mansion was begun. A bonfire blazed in almost every street, fed by the household goods of those whose homes had been despoiled. All through the panic-stricken town there was the fierce, hurried tramp of a frenzied multitude, who thundered forth the strident war-cry of "No Popery."

Newgate Prison fell before the rebels, its massive doors beaten down by the besiegers, and after the malefactors had been rescued, the whole edifice was devoured by flames. Hard by in Holborn, a few hours later, a still more mighty fire rose from the distillery of a Catholic gentleman, and a deep stream of raw spirits poured down the gutter along the roadside from the scores of vats that had been staved in by the rioters, while a surging crowd lapped it greedily in their hands. Presently, bursting into flame, the fiery flood<sup>a</sup> swept upon the besotted wretches who clustered around its brink, and in a moment a mass of burning humanity was reeling through the streets, shrieking and fighting in the agonies of death. Scores of men, women and children lay in drunken slumber on the pavement. There was scarcely a pause in the work of ruin. From house to house the riotous mob hurried swiftly with torch and crowbar, bursting through the doors, flinging the furniture from the windows, burning and smashing, mad with the lust of loot and devastation. Now and then the sound of guns, as the soldiers fired upon the people, mingled with the crash of falling masonry. The blaze from the burning buildings illumined all things as clearly as the light of day.

All through the crisis Wilkes behaved with his usual



courage. Perceiving from the first that strenuous measures were needed to preserve the public peace, he set the right example to his fellow-aldermen by collecting an armed company from among the residents of his ward and placed himself at their head. As soon as it became necessary to raise a force for the protection of the Bank of England, he volunteered to assist the soldiers, and on Wednesday evening, when the tumult was at its height, he took his place in Threadneedle Street among the defenders. A terrible spectacle met his eyes. The flames of thirty-six great fires rolled up above the house-tops, dyeing in bright crimson the clear, star-lit sky. A mass of battered and blackened buildings stretched before him. A seething multitude, mad with drink or wild with religious rage, was howling execrations against the military. Gathering strength at every instant, reinforced by every thief and cut-throat in the town, at last towards midnight the mob summoned courage to make an attack. Led by a youth riding a horse caparisoned with chains from Newgate, there was a rush towards the great gate of the bank. With a resolute colonel in command, and a magistrate like Wilkes to give counsel, the gospel of "thorough" was sternly observed. Volley after volley rang out, and as the daunted crowd wavered and fell back the soldiers charged upon them. And at the head of the party that drove the rioters away towards the river strode the old Buckinghamshire militiaman in his red coat and three-cocked hat, as gallant a leader as ever cheered his men on to victory.<sup>1</sup>

All the next day he was still under arms, taking part in guerilla skirmishes with the rabble, or parading with a patrol through the streets. While snatching a moment to admonish the Lord Mayor he received an intimation that the Commanding Officer at St. Paul's was urgently

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Diary*, June 7, 1780; *Letters of S. Johnson*, G. B. Hill, ii. 174-5; *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), ii. 114; *Public Advertiser*, June 13 and 14, 1780.

in need of reinforcements, so, hurriedly collecting a handful of troops, he marched them off to the scene of action. All night long, until five o'clock on the following morning, the tireless alderman remained on guard in St. Sepulchre's Churchyard, beside Newgate prison, where the riot had been fiercest and which even yet was one of the danger spots of the metropolis, in charge of "a good party of horse and foot" and with his faithful followers "the armed inhabitants of the ward" of Farringdon Without. In the midst of this strenuous employment he managed to find time to send a note to his daughter to tell her that he was safe. On the next night, too, he was "doing duty" again at St. Sepulchre's till long after daybreak, having come thither early in the afternoon when he had finished his work at Guildhall. On the morrow he came to grips once more with the rioters, dispersing a great mob in Fleet Street, and seizing the publisher of a seditious paper. For almost a week he patrolled his ward from time to time thoroughly with a party of horse and foot, making many arrests, and holding a court each day until late in the evening for the examination of the prisoners. When order was restored he received the thanks of the Privy Council for his services.<sup>1</sup>

Bitterly indignant at the conduct of some of his colleagues during the disturbances, Wilkes took the first opportunity of making a protest in the House of Commons. In the debate on the King's Speech respecting the riots, when Parliament met once more after its long adjournment, he made a vehement attack upon Lord Mayor Kennett, declaring that "if proper care had been taken in the city by the first magistrate the mischief done there might have been prevented." In a later speech on the same day he censured his old comrade, the docile Bull, still more severely,

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Diary*, June 8-18, 1780; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 212-13; cf. *Hist. and Post. Memoirs of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), i. 249; Add. MS. 30,872, f. 196; *Correspondence of George III with Lord North*, ii. 324; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), xi. 223; *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 464; *Morning Post*, June 13, 1780.

accusing him, with some truth, of being in sympathy with the rioters, and alleging that he had walked away from St. Stephen's on the afternoon that the petition was presented arm in arm with Lord George Gordon.<sup>1</sup>

In the following year Wilkes lost his brave old mother, who died on the 22nd of January at the age of eighty-one.<sup>2</sup> Since the death of her eldest daughter, the gentle Sally, who, poor valetudinarian that she was, had never married, the venerable old lady had removed from Hart Street, Bloomsbury, to Old Palace Yard, Westminster, so as to be near the little house in Prince's Court. Left in comparative affluence by her husband, she was always able to keep a coach, and had faithful servants to care for her. In later years her children were a source of much sorrow. The death of poor Sally, which deprived her of a loving companion, was a still greater blow, because it was hastened by the tempestuous Mrs. Hayley, who distressed the invalid deeply by invading the sick-room to pick "an outrageous quarrel" with her mother. Israel Wilkes, her eldest son, gave her many anxious moments also, being vacillating and improvident, a lethargic, plausible, Micawber-like gentleman, wandering over Europe, then to Africa, and eventually to the West Indies in the hope that something would turn up. The docile Heaton, too, was as inefficient as he was amiable, and, after reducing the family business to a state of bankruptcy, was obliged to become a partner in a small firm of coal merchants.<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly it was at Prince's Court that old Mrs.

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xxi. 701-2; *Journal of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, ii. 418.

<sup>2</sup> Fiske Pedigree at Herald's College; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1781), p. 47; *London Magazine* (1781), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> References to the mother of John Wilkes will be found in Add. MSS. 30,869, ff. 98, 119, 158; 30,879, ff. 55, 110, 126; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 142; Will of Sarah Wilkes, P.C.C. 53, Webster; *Wilkes's Diary*, *passim*; *Public Advertiser*, March 28, 1771; *True Briton*, Dec. 30, 1797. Also her numerous letters in the Wilkes MSS. sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913.

Wilkes spent the happiest hours of her life. Of all her grandchildren the tactful Polly was her prime favourite, having been her confidant since childhood in everything relating to her celebrated son, and she often sought the good offices of the girl when she desired to influence the father. Through this loving alliance the deepest affection had always existed between the grandparent and the granddaughter. Intensely proud of the famous John, taking an absorbing interest in every incident of his career, the fond mother was ever on the watch to protect him from the consequences of his indiscretions, never failing to deliver a wholesome lecture if it seemed necessary. In spite of the frequent differences of opinion Wilkes was a devoted son, never lacking in attention to the old lady, and receiving her opinions with filial respect. Although he may not always have acknowledged it, he was grateful for her solicitude and generally followed her advice.

A splendid letter, which led him to break his connection with the notorious Mrs. Gardiner, is a typical example of her vigilance and outspokenness :

"May I not flatter my Self," she wrote to him from Hart Street on the 23rd of October, 1771, "that the near connection with a dear Son will supersede apologising for the free Contents of this Billet? My duty and affection will not suffer me silently to lament your present very obnoxious conduct in making so frequent visits to the infamous Mrs. Gardiner, unhappily situated in my neighbourhood.<sup>1</sup> A late visit in your Sheriff's Chariot (which has been repeated too) has been severely censured, but not more than such an Insult upon Public decency merited! My Intelligence came from Conduit Street, so distant has it already travelled. A Gentleman and Friend to the Public Cause then address'd you with an admonition not to enter *that* House. He afterwards expressed his concern

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Gardiner lived in a house at the corner of Charlotte Street and Thorney Street, Bloomsbury.

in the Strongest and most Pathetic Terms, said it was a dagger to his heart. The populace that was gather'd would not permit the Blinds to be drawn up. They Hiss'd you, as a detestation of you entering a notorious Bawdy House. You are continually observ'd and watch'd, as is also Mr. —, no stranger to you! 'Tis true that I have the pity of the Neighbourhood (for 'tis publickly talked), which in this case is a sad mortification. I see the fatal Consequences from the loss of Popularity, which will not only disserve the best of causes, but even sink a *great Patriot* into Contempt. Many of the Midling Class of People (thank Heaven) revere virtue and see Vice countenanced by a Magistrate with *double* abhorrence, whose duty it is to suppress it. Let me now Conjure you, with the most ardent Parental affection, to bid a final adieu to all Infamous and Ruinous Connections, and *this in particular*. O! my Dear Son do not sacrifice Temporal and Eternal Felicity to any Criminal Indulgences. But let that wisest Gift Reason regulate and subdue Inordinate Passions, which will be the Noblest Triumph and reward you with Inexpressible Satisfaction and Tranquillity, and you will then cause a Mother's Heart to Sing for Joy, who is most Affectionately yours,

S. WILKES."<sup>1</sup>

Three years later, on the 3rd of April, 1784, John Wilkes became a widower. "Mrs. Wilkes died" was the laconic entry in his diary on the date in question. For four days he dined alone with his daughter or took a solitary meal at Kensington Gore, entertaining no friends until the 8th of the month, and not accepting any invitation to dinner for a fortnight. During the space of six months he wore mourning. Beyond these conventional observances he showed no sign of sorrow. Latterly, since the death of Mrs. Meade, the ancient animosity between the incongru-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Sarah Wilkes, dated Oct. 23, 1771, in the Wilkes MSS. sold at Sotheby's, Aug. 1, 1913.

ous pair had lost much of its bitterness, and there had been several false rumours of a reconciliation. For many years Polly had been in the habit of paying frequent visits to her mother's country house at Clapham with her father's approval, while Mrs. Wilkes sometimes spoke kindly of her husband in the girl's presence. In comparison with the acrimony of former years this was a great advance in mutual tolerance.

The death of Mrs. Meade, an implacable enemy of her son-in-law, did not come until it was too late to blot out the past, and her vindictive will would have made it impossible under any circumstances to put an end to the quarrel. To the pious mind of Mrs. Wilkes the constant infidelities of her husband were the deadliest of sins, the arrogance of feminine self-restraint preventing her from understanding that a man who is deserted by his wife does not become necessarily a misogynist. On his side he had regarded her always as "the woman in the world the most unfit for him," and, while professing to hold her in esteem, he acknowledged that all his affection had vanished. Many years before her death her lethargy had grown into an absolute disease, for even in summer weather and when in perfect health she scarcely ever went out of doors. However great the faults on his part, Wilkes certainly had the misfortune to marry a dull, lazy, and unaffectionate wife.<sup>1</sup>

During this summer there was grave discord in the Hayley family. The alderman had died three years previously, leaving a considerable fortune invested in business. In the administration of his estate "the brimstone qualities" of his widow manifested themselves once more as she began to quarrel with her daughter over money matters, declining to observe the terms of her husband's will. For in the

<sup>1</sup> For references to Mrs. John Wilkes, see Add. MSS. 30,868, ff. 154, 172; 30,879, ff. 30, 32, 38, 40, 110; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 164, 289; Letters of Wilkes and Dell, April 26 and May 3, 1757; Will of Mary Wilkes, P.C.C. 295, Rockingham; *The North Briton* (W. Bingley), vol. i., Part I, p. lxxxvi.; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 17.

previous autumn Miss Hayley had been married to Robert Baker, a captain in the Devon Militia, and her mother, regarding her son-in-law as a mere fortune-hunter, tried to prevent the bride from gaining possession of her inheritance. A lawsuit ensued, Captain Baker, who was deep in debt, being compelled meanwhile to take his wife to St. Omer to escape from his creditors. The expectation of a grandchild momentarily softened Mrs. Hayley's heart, and upon her arrival in Boston, whither she had been obliged to sail to look after her property, she sent a conciliatory letter and a present of money. Business worries, however, detained her in America, and some time elapsed before the young couple could pay their debts and return to England. Fortune was kind to them in after years, greatly to the joy of Wilkes, who loved his "sweet niece," for Captain Baker earned distinction as a soldier and was created a baronet.<sup>1</sup>

By his gallant conduct during the Gordon Riots Wilkes made his position as Chamberlain of London invulnerable to all attack for many years. In any case it is doubtful whether the ministerial party would have followed the bad example of contesting the office as long as he held it with propriety, and as he proved a most capable manager of the city accounts, there were no grounds for opposing his annual re-election. Naturally, a host of sceptics deprecated the appointment of an incorrigible spendthrift as treasurer of the corporation, the fact that he was placed in charge of "the monies, lands and goods, of the city orphans" eliciting all the old insinuations about the Foundling Hospital. With imperturbable good-humour Wilkes merely laughed at these incredible aspersions.

"Have you seen the infamous libel against you," demanded an indignant friend, "in to-day's paper?"

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,872, f. 255; *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, i. 329; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 74, iii. 85, 89, 147, 155; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 108, 114; *Burke's Peerage*; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1783), p. 804; (1805), Part I, p. 295; *Maryland Journal*, June 4, 1784; *Massachusetts Sentinel*, May 26, 1784.



DENAH HAVELY  
AFTERWARDS LADY BAKER  
*own a miniature in the possession of*  
Sir G. Baker





"Yes," chuckled Wilkes, "I've just been writing to the printer of another paper to copy it."

Once a political antagonist, wishing to insult him in public, accused him to his face of all sorts of crimes. After listening patiently to the tirade Wilkes bent towards his defamer with a quiet smile.

"You have a wretched memory," he observed, pleasantly; "you have forgotten all about the Foundling Hospital!"<sup>1</sup>

Wilkes could afford to laugh at his enemies. The income of his office was a splendid one. Although he did not receive more than £500 per annum in direct payments from the city his emoluments amounted to more than £1500 a year, the perquisites of the post compensating for the smallness of the salary. Since all the revenues of the corporation passed through his account there was often a large balance in his hands, and the opportunities of subscribing for Government loans on favourable terms were innumerable. Like ministerial paymasters and army commissaries in those easy times the Chamberlain of London was entitled to the profits of this stock-jobbing, while he ran no risk in investing public money in public funds. Whenever there was a balance in the city treasury he was able to make lucrative deals in Navy and Victualling Bills or Long and Short Annuities.<sup>2</sup> Little wonder that he described his office as "a post adequate, after the payment of my debts, to every wish I can form at 53: profit, patronage, and extensive usefulness, with rank and dignity."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Oct. 26, 1776; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 227; cf. *Letters of Mrs. Delany*, v. 493. The duties of the Chamberlain are set forth in *History of London*, B. Lambert, iii. 215, 224; *History of London*, J. Entick, iii. 328, 338.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), xi. 66; City Account Book for 1789-90, ff. 152, 278, 304; Accounts of John Wilkes, Chamberlain of City of London for 1794, 1795, 1796, kindly furnished by Dr. R. R. Sharpe from the Account Books at Guildhall; Report of Committee for Letting the City Lands on June 30, 1801; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 82-3, 141.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 37.

At the same time he was careful to do nothing irregular, relying meticulously upon precedent in all his monetary dealings, keeping his accounts in perfect order, knowing full well that many of his old enemies were eager to accuse him of speculation. A Scottish common-councillor, named John Cowley, soon established himself as a permanent censor, criticising all the financial statements of the Chamberlain persistently, but notwithstanding the most watchful surveillance he was never able to lay his finger upon a flaw.<sup>1</sup> Many of his colleagues also were displeased that Wilkes should remain an alderman, it having been always the custom hitherto for the Chamberlain to resign his gown.<sup>2</sup> With these exceptions little hostile criticism was raised. In every respect Wilkes proved a most efficient city treasurer, none of his predecessors having been more regular in attending to their duties, or discharging them with such patient thoroughness. It was apparent, moreover, that his personality conferred an unusual distinction upon the office.<sup>3</sup>

In one particular he could display his irrepressible humour without loss of dignity. Every morning, except during the vacations, the Chamberlain held a court for the enrolling of apprentices, and the daily homilies that Wilkes addressed to the youths who came before him, though spoken with the most solemn gravity, were full of delicious drollery. More than a generation later Charles Mathews, the great mimic, was able to convulse an audience by giving an imitation of the late John Wilkes admonishing a small boy.<sup>4</sup> One of these apprentices himself, a stage-struck lad named Thomas Dibdin, who laid a complaint at

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1788), p. 559; (1823), Part II, p. 472; *The Oracle*, Dec. 30, 1797; *Morning Post*, March 24, 1786; June 20, 1788; Jan. 12, Feb. 19, 1791; April 4, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> *Morning Post*, June 14, 1791.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 200; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 122.

<sup>4</sup> *Diary of Crabb Robinson*, ii. 229; cf. *The World*, Dec. 31, 1787.

the Chamberlain's office because his master had thrashed him for playing with a toy theatre when he ought to have been at work, has described how the spectators in court used to appreciate the wit and wisdom of the old patriot. And as Wilkes was making peace between the aggrieved youth and his choleric master young Dibdin noticed that "while the worthy magistrate exhorted Sir William he appeared to be looking full at *me*; and while he admonished *me* his eyes seemed fixed on Sir William." <sup>1</sup>

After the death of Rockingham in the summer of 1782 a slow but sure metamorphosis began to take place in the political opinions of John Wilkes. A gradual estrangement from Charles Fox soon brought about a complete severance of old ties. Up to the end of 1781 he had been one of the most loyal supporters of the member for Westminster, appearing on his platforms and acquiescing in his leadership.<sup>2</sup> Then, within the space of twelve months, Fox was responsible for three acts, which, in the opinion of Wilkes, were wholly alien to Whig principles. He tried to prevent the resolution concerning the Middlesex election from being expunged from the Journals of the House. He retired from office because he disapproved of Shelburne as Rockingham's successor, although the ministry was confronted with the mighty task of making peace with America. Finally, he rent the party in twain by a coalition with Lord North, the late Tory Premier. It seemed to Wilkes that the last of the old Whigs had died with their late leader, and that independence more than ever before must in future be his *métier*. At the same time he began to be a regular attender at the king's levee.<sup>3</sup>

Within a few months he was acting in violent opposition to the coalition Government under Lord North, which

<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences of Thomas Dibdin*, i. 29-35.

<sup>2</sup> *Morning Post*, Feb. 4, 1780; *Morning Herald*, Dec. 11, 1781.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Herald*, Aug. 10 and 28, Nov. 13, 1782; Jan. 28, Feb. 27, March 15, April 8, 1783; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 124; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 343.

had driven Lord Shelburne out of office. From the first he had regarded it as a "monstrous, unnatural union of incongruous, discordant particles that could only be brought to coalesce for the division of the public spoils," and when Fox, as Secretary of State, introduced his India Bill Wilkes was one of the most vehement critics of the new measure.<sup>1</sup> Beyond all doubt his sincerity was unquestionable, whatever may have been the value of his judgment. In his opinion the proposed act was a violation of the Charter of John Company, while it left the patronage of India a prey to the greediness of faction. It seemed to him that Lord North, who had striven to crush the freedom of America, was prompting his colleague in a sinister design against the liberties of the Anglo-Indian.<sup>2</sup> A strong vein of imperialism, moreover, the heritage of his early intercourse with Pitt, influenced Wilkes's sympathies. The splendid deeds of Warren Hastings had fired his imagination, and he believed that in order to preserve our empire in the East Parliament must be loyal to the traditions of the great proconsul.<sup>3</sup> Holding such views, he rejoiced in the overthrow of Fox and North, welcoming the appointment of the younger Pitt as Prime Minister.

Early in the new year he was favoured with a unique opportunity—dissociated ostensibly from party politics—of emphasising his approval of the youthful Premier. When the freedom of the City of London was presented to Pitt at Grocer's Hall on the 28th of February it became the duty of the Chamberlain to make the official speech. As always on such occasions Wilkes delivered an admirable oration. At his first reference to the name of Chatham his voice trembled and his eyes filled with tears, for, notwithstanding the lamentable termination of their friendship,

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, xxiv. 15-28; *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 390; *Hist. and Post. Mem. of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), iii. 178; *Morning Herald*, Dec. 9, 1783.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 389.

<sup>3</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 379.

# THE NEW COALITION

*Not to be taken for granted  
by the Opposition*

*Not to be  
taken for granted*



*Geo. 3*

*J. Wilkes*

*George Fort & live!*

*John's Privilege!*

*A reconciliation with the Lamb & the Lion  
a reconciliation with the Cat & the young  
the reconciliation with the old & the new*

*the reconciliation with the old & the new*

*Isaac Newton*

**West Elect P 317 329. 180**

**RECONCILIATION OF GEORGE III. AND WILKES**  
*From a contemporary caricature*



he never lost his old reverence for his great leader.<sup>1</sup> "The administration of your noble father gave us security at home," he continued in the imperialist style of which he was so fond, "carried the glory of this nation to the utmost height abroad, and extended the bounds of the Empire to countries where the Roman eagle never flew."<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, many of his supporters were indignant that he should tolerate a minister nominated by the king, alleging that his opposition to the India Bill was caused by the fear of offending the City of London.<sup>3</sup> At the general election following the dissolution of Parliament a three-cornered fight took place for the representation of the county of Middlesex. Wilkes appeared as a joint candidate with William Mainwaring, one of the "King's friends," while George Byng, his late colleague, opposed him. At no time during the contest was his triumph ever in doubt. Relying upon the old familiar battle-cries of shorter Parliaments and a reform of the House of Commons he gained an easy victory over the partisans of the coalition, his nominee being elected with him. A scrutiny, prompted by the disappointed Byng, was unsuccessful.<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of Wilkes among the supporters of the king and Pitt in their contest with Fox and North—in which as heretofore he was on the popular side—delighted the humorists exceedingly. Squibs and caricatures were scattered broadcast, and one of the latter, representing George the Third in the act of embracing the old agitator,

<sup>1</sup> *Anecdotes of Chatham*, J. Almon, iii. 362; *Mirabeau's Letters during his Residence in England*, i. 95; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, p. 441; *London's Roll of Fame* (Cassell); *Town and Country Magazine* (1784), p. 164; *Morning Post*, March 1 and 10, 1784.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Post*, Jan. 27, 1784; Add. MS. 30,895, f. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Representative History of Great Britain*, T. H. B. Oldfield, iv. 180; *Life of E. Malone*, p. 363; Add. MSS. 30,895, ff. 58, 59, 61, 70, 72; *Public Advertiser*, April 24, 27, May 3, 1784; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1784), p. 381; cf. *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 11, 12, 106; *William Pitt and National Revival*, J. Holland Rose, p. 171. The figures were: William Mainwaring 2117, John Wilkes 1858, George Byng 1787.



expressed very neatly the sentiment of the hour.<sup>1</sup> At last both the monarch and the subject might have exclaimed, in the words of Dr. Johnson at a similar reconciliation, "the contest is now over." Once at a levee the king, who frequently had a chat with his former enemy, happened to mention the name of Sergeant Glynn.

"Sir," replied Wilkes, with perfect nonchalance, "he was no friend of mine. He was a Wilkite, which I never was."<sup>2</sup>

While dining with the Prince of Wales, who was now on very bad terms with his father, Wilkes was called upon for a toast. Without a moment's hesitation he gave "the King and long life to him."

"Since when have you become so loyal?" sneered the unfilial prince, laughing.

"Ever since I have had the honour of knowing your Royal Highness," replied Wilkes, accompanying the reproach with a respectful bow.<sup>3</sup>

One day as he was walking along the street an old woman cried out, "Wilkes and Liberty."

"Be quiet, you old fool," growled the ex-demagogue. "That's all over long ago."<sup>4</sup>

Political opponents ridiculed his apostasy in a hundred satires, the following effusion being attributed to Sheridan:—

"Johnny Wilkes, Johnny Wilkes,  
Thou greatest of bilks,  
How changed are the notes you now sing!  
Your famed Forty-five  
Is Prerogative,  
And your blasphemy 'God save the King.'"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Caricature History of the Georges*, J. Wright, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Lord Eldon*, H. Twiss, ii. 356.

<sup>3</sup> *The Courts of Europe*, H. Swinburne, i. 399; *Life of Lord Eldon*, H. Twiss, ii. 355; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 226; cf. *Literary Anecdotes*, E. H. Barker, ii. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Bedford Correspondence*, iii. 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Life of Sheridan*, T. Moore, ii. 81; *Mems. of Thomas Moore*, ii. 312.

With a great man's reverence for the greatness of another Wilkes had unbounded admiration for the genius of the young Premier. "Mr. Pitt is greatly improved as an orator," he declared, a month after Parliament had met. "He has more smoothness and grace, more Attic laugh and easy irony, without the sharpness and gall of the last session. Mr. Fox's power declines hourly." A week later he was rejoicing in the discomfiture of the enemy. "The great majority of the present administration has driven the Opposition almost to despair, while Mr. Fox loses his temper more and more every day." To the financial policy of the new Government he gave his cordial approval. "Mr. Pitt is greatly extolled," he observed on the eve of the Budget, "for his late proposition to abolish smuggling and lay an adequate duty on windows. . . . He establishes himself more and more in the hearts of the people."<sup>1</sup>

For the most part he continued to observe his habit of silence, only addressing the House occasionally in a brief speech. It was not until three years later that he was constrained at length to intervene in a notable debate, the impeachment of Warren Hastings calling forth a last oration. Believing that this illustrious friend was the victim of "the same envious faction" that had persecuted his noble friend Rodney, he turned upon the accusers in his wrath, animated by all the old fire and passion that had borne him through the great battles of former times. He was an old man now, old beyond his years. The scanty locks, brushed neatly over his forehead, were crusted with powder to conceal his baldness. Clean white ruffles and an embroidered vest were in strange contrast with his faded red coat. The heavy jaw hung down truculently, and as he spoke the husky voice swelled into a hoarse note of indignation. He was defending a friend and preaching the gospel of imperialism, and he felt the inspiration of a great cause.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 23, 27, 61.

The unjustness of the impeachment was the whole burden of his speech. "The late Governor-General of Bengal has been frequently, by a right honourable gentleman, compared to the Roman Prætor of Sicily, Verres. The fairness of the comparison has not, I believe, been so much thought of as an indirect and sly compliment to the original accuser among us. He imagined that an association of ideas would naturally lead the mind to the Prince of Roman orators, to Cicero, our prototype, the accuser of Verres. I do not quite comprehend the justness of the comparison. In the impeachment of Verres every city, town, and village of Sicily, except Syracuse and Messian, . . . concurred. The impeachment of the late Governor-General of Bengal has been announced to the public above four years. Where, sir, are the petitions to this House against him from a single town or village, or the most inconsiderable body of men, or even an individual in all Asia? . . . The fact, sir, is that no man was ever more beloved throughout Indostan than Mr. Hastings. His departure was lamented by all the natives and Europeans as a general calamity. They gave him every public and private testimony of affection and esteem as their common father and friend. The voluntary tribute of tears was paid by a whole people. It was reserved for a faction and party in this House . . . to hold us out to the ridicule of mankind by this Parliamentary inquisition, this persecution of exalted merit by an impeachment."<sup>1</sup>

It was acclaimed a superlative speech, the best that he had ever delivered, though it is strange that he, of all men, neglected to affirm the unanswerable truth that whenever the legislature has attempted to usurp the functions of the judiciary it has always committed a political blunder and generally has been guilty of the gravest injustice.

<sup>1</sup> *Speech of Mr. Wilkes*, May 9, 1787; *Parliamentary History*, xxvi. 1101, 1102; *Hist. and Post. Mem. of Sir N. W. Wraxall* (Wheatley), v. 2-3; *The World*, May 10, 1787; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1787), Part II, p. 1134; *European Magazine*, xi. 425.



MRS. MOLLIN

*From a portrait in the possession of Major Montgomerie of Carlisle Old Hall*



Although Hastings and Rodney were his bosom friends, and he was a welcome guest in the houses of the great, Wilkes did not neglect his little circle of old acquaintances. In Prince's Court itself there were his neighbours, Colonel and Mrs. Gordon—with whom both he and Polly dined more often than with anyone else—and an old lady named Mrs. Smith, one of his most appreciative gossips. Of the Molineux family he was as fond as ever, both he and his daughter paying much attention to "the widow," who divided her time between Bath and London, separated from her husband. Betsy, the prettiest of the girls, was now married to Sir William Burnaby, a captain in the navy, who was as much attached to Wilkes as his young wife. With Mr. and Mrs. Swinburne, the happy pair to whom he had sent the pheasant, he was on terms of the closest intimacy, for, being great travellers, they knew many of his continental acquaintances. Mademoiselle D'Eon, as he dubbed him, was often his guest, and also Edmund Dayrell, the old henchman of Lord Temple. Almost every day, when he did not dine out, he had friends to dinner.<sup>1</sup>

For many years Wilkes had been anxious to possess a residence in the Isle of Wight, but it was not until the spring of 1788 that he discovered one that was suitable. It was a tiny two-storied house, standing alone on the gorse-covered downs above the sea in the midst of Sandown Bay, half a mile nearer to Shanklin than the fort, with an open view of the expansive shore as far as the cliffs on either side. There were only a few rooms in the little dwelling, but it had a picturesque exterior with its latticed windows and creeper-clad walls, and Wilkes, fascinated by the wind-swept situation and the beautiful coast, fell in love with it at first sight. Before leaving he tried to persuade Colonel Barker, the owner of the property, to give him a lease of Sandham Cottage for twenty-one years, and suc-

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes's *Diary*, *vide* Add. MSS. 30,866, and Wilkes's *List of Addresses*, *vide* Add. MSS. 30,892, *passim*.

ceeded in obtaining one of fourteen. It was agreed that he should take possession at once.<sup>1</sup>

With his usual energy he lost no time in trying to improve his little home. Having acquired about four acres of land he was able to gratify his taste for landscape gardening, though handicapped greatly by the barrenness of the soil. In a little while he had altered the property beyond recognition. Young shrubberies of stunted trees were struggling against the gale, and an apple orchard blossomed abundantly. A broad grass walk, over a hundred yards in length, with seats and arbours here and there, stretched along the front of the house, parallel with the shore. Winding paths with herbaceous borders cut their way through the bracken and furze-bushes of the heath. A large pond, well stocked with fish, adjoined a prolific kitchen-garden, and in a secluded part of the grounds, beneath a little grove of cypresses and weeping willows, there stood a Doric column, bearing the porphyry urn presented by Winckelmann, engraved with a Latin inscription to the memory of Charles Churchill. Within the pedestal, which was made of oak, the old jester kept a fine stock of port wine, whispering to the friends whom he allowed to taste it that he could not possibly offer a better sacrifice to the manes of the dead poet. Everyone agreed that he had succeeded in making a very fine garden on the wind-swept downs of Sandown Bay.<sup>2</sup>

A great lover of birds Wilkes kept a menagerie of all sorts, building several large aviaries in various parts of the grounds. There was a spacious "pheasantry," of which he was very proud, and a long "gallery" contained a heterogeneous collection of fowls. Dovecotes were dotted about in profusion, while to attract the wild birds boxes, full of corn, hung from every tree. Little flocks of pigeons were always

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,873, ff. 91, 93, 96, 113; 30,874, f. 35; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 78; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iv. 1-2; *Wilkes's Diary*, May 30, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1794), Part II, pp. 779-80; (1804), Part I, p. 17; (1805), Part I, pp. 54-6; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 151-2, 163.

strutting over the sloping lawns, or looking down from the house-tops. Whenever these were admired by a visitor Wilkes always spoke of his difficulty in getting them to stay with him.

"I bought my pigeons in England and Ireland and France," he observed sorrowfully, "but they all flew away. Then, at last," he added with a twinkle in his eye, "I got some from Scotland. They never returned."<sup>1</sup>

Of all the new erections in the garden of Sandham Cottage the strangest by far were two spacious pavilions, made of canvas floorcloth, manufactured at the Knightsbridge factory, a fashionable form of construction at that period. The larger of the two, a room eight yards in length overlooking the sea, full of rare china and costly furniture, was dedicated to the incomparable Polly, an inscription on the wall announcing that it had been erected "To Filial Piety and Mary Wilkes." In the other, which was known as the Tuscan room, painted a dead white, there was a numerous collection of engravings and some beautiful satin-wood chairs. Although only habitable in the summer time, these airy apartments were invaluable when he wished to entertain his friends.<sup>2</sup>

In this lonely little place near Sandown Fort—his "villakin" as he called it—Wilkes took the most intense pride, visiting it often twice a year, and living there for two months every summer. Sometimes Mrs. Arnold and little Harriet would keep him company for a part of his holiday, after which Polly would come to stay with him, never arriving, however, until the others had departed. Never

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Post*, July 14, 1791; *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 112; *Life of Frederick Reynolds*, ii. 105; cf. Add. MSS. 30,873, f. 172; 30,874, f. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *The Isle of Wight*, E. Boucher James, ii. 542-7; *History of the Isle of Wight*, W. H. D. Adams, pp. 203-4; *Tour of the Isle of Wight*, J. Hassell, ii. 21-2; *A Description of the Isle of Wight*, H. C. Englefield, Plate XIX; *Diaries of Mrs. P. L. Powys*, pp. 265-6; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 151; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1794), Part II, p. 779; Add. MSS. 30,873, ff. 111-98; 30,874, ff. 10-85.



at any period of his life had Wilkes been happier than now, never, on the whole, had he been in better health. With an ample income, free from all anxieties for the future, and the favourite of a host of friends, he was not the least regretful that he had become an extinct volcano.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE END

1788-1797

**W**HEN the king was taken ill, and it seemed unlikely that he would recover his reason, Wilkes passed through a period of much anxiety. For him the political situation was full of menace. If a Regency were established it was probable that he would lose his seat in Parliament, and possibly be deposed from the office of Chamberlain. From his point of view it was most important that the Prince of Wales should not be invested with the royal authority, for in such a contingency it was inevitable that Fox would come into power. Although still claiming a nominal independence, Wilkes's political fortunes were bound up with those of Pitt and the Tories, and it was certain that his old allies would be glad to punish him for his apostasy.<sup>1</sup>

During the three months that the king's malady was at its height, Polly Wilkes was staying in Paris on a long visit to her old friend, Madame La Vallière, Duchesse de Chastillon, and all through the momentous winter she received the latest bulletins from her father, who was ever on the watch for news of the royal invalid. Upon each favourable symptom he dwelt joyously, as though he were announcing the convalescence of a beloved relative, "thanking Heaven" when there was improvement, exulting greatly when the patient slept or was able to take food. "The stories of the King, Queen, and youngest Princess," he

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes joined with Fox in opposing the Shop Tax in 1787. Vide *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. lvii., Part I, p. 144.

wrote in a burst of feeling, "are so affecting that I have not courage to transcribe them."<sup>1</sup> A very different Wilkes indeed this sentimentalist who paid "the voluntary tribute of tears" to the pathos of royal domesticity from the malicious author of "No. 45." The jest of his revolutionary days that "he loved the King so well that he hoped never to see another" no longer had a double meaning.<sup>2</sup>

As long as the illness of George the Third lasted the struggle between the two parties was a desperate one. On the one side Fox contended that the Prince of Wales had "an inherent right to assume the reins of Government," while Pitt, who distrusted the heir-apparent utterly, used all his endeavours to make the Regency conditional. Staking everything upon the chance of the king's recovery the Prime Minister proposed to curb the authority of the Prince by withholding his right to make peers and give places. The motives of both protagonists were obvious. Fox, a friend of the Prince, was eager for office; Pitt, knowing that he would be dismissed as soon as the Regent was appointed, was firm in his allegiance to the invalid monarch. At last when, after many weeks of stormy debate, the Regency Bill had passed the House of Commons, the king began to recover rapidly, and Wilkes wrote gleefully to his daughter to tell her the good news.<sup>3</sup>

In the early stages of the great crisis, when it seemed as if the Government was doomed, Lord Chancellor Thurlow had been guilty of strange duplicity towards his colleagues. Entering into negotiations with Fox he agreed to give his support to an unrestricted Regency, provided that he should be allowed to retain the woolsack under the new ministry. Later, when the reports of the king's condition were becoming more hopeful, he deemed it wise to change

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 234, 236, 239, 242, 245, 248, 252, 264, 269, 273, 288, 310, 327, 333; cf. *The World*, Jan. 1, 3, 9, and 29, 1789.

<sup>2</sup> *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 114.

<sup>3</sup> *History of England*, W. E. H. Lecky, v. 96-147.

his attitude. In a speech on the 15th of December he warmly endorsed the policy of Pitt, and amazed the House of Lords by bursting into a flood of tears. "When I forget my King," he blubbered in a fulsome peroration, "may my God forget me!"

"God forget you," muttered Wilkes, who was at his cottage in the Isle of Wight when he heard of the outburst of the treacherous Chancellor, "He'll see you damned first!"<sup>1</sup>

Wilkes found many congenial neighbours in his island home. Five miles to the south-west in the beautiful park of Appuldurcomb dwelt a gentle connoisseur, named Sir Richard Worsley, whose spacious mansion was filled with statues, gems, and *bassi-relievi*, a wonderful museum of classic art. Knighton House, a picturesque Elizabethan pile on Brading Down, was the residence of George Maurice Bissett, happily married now, but a few years previously the co-respondent of a notorious divorce case in which his dilettante neighbour was the petitioner. Sir Nash Grose, a judge of the King's Bench, was the owner of the Priory, and Sir William Oglander lived at Nunwell, the seat of his family since the Conquest. Nearer than these were the Rev. Mr. Hewson, incumbent of Shanklin, and Captain Field, the commander of Sandown Fort. Everyone lavished hospitality upon Wilkes, who was always giving dinner-parties himself at the "villakin."<sup>2</sup>

In the summer that he acquired his cottage by the sea Wilkes published an edition of the poems of Catullus in a small quarto volume, printed at the press of John Nichols, whom he had recently appointed a Deputy of the Ward of Farringdon Without. The title-page ran as follows: "Caius Valerius

<sup>1</sup> *Life of William Pitt*, Lord Stanhope, ii. 10; cf. *Wilkes's Diary*, Dec. 1788; *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, xi. 270; *William Pitt and the National Revival*, J. Holland Rose, p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> *The Isle of Wight*, E. B. James, i. 449, 487-8, 598; *Tour of the Isle of Wight*, J. Hassell, ii. 2, 7, 23, 29, 34, 67, 73, 74; *A Description of the Isle of Wight*, H. C. Englefield, pp. 104-5; *Dic. Nat. Biog.*; *Wilkes's Diary*.

Catullus. Recensuit Johannes Wilkes, Anglus. Londini, 1788. Typis Johannis Nichols." The work had been suggested by Count Revicsky, the Imperial Ambassador, a collector of *Editiones Principes*, who frequently dined with Wilkes in company with Henry Swinburne. Consisting only of 103 copies, the impression was regarded both by its printer and editor as perfectly immaculate—"not a word misspelt; not a stop misplaced or omitted." Modern scholarship has scarcely endorsed this claim, clerical errors of importance having been pointed out, while the text was not chosen as the basis of subsequent editions. Among his contemporaries, however, Wilkes gained much credit for his labours, and the eminent persons to whom he presented a copy were warm in their eulogies.<sup>1</sup>

Two years later the same publisher printed for him, as a companion volume to the first work, an edition of the *Ethical Characters of Theophrastus*, the first complete one that had yet appeared. To the dismay of scholars both the accents and the breathings were omitted, Wilkes retorting airily to an objector "that he would willingly be at the expense of printing a single copy (for him) with accents, if he would be at the pains of finding a person who would first make and afterwards correct them." Although the typography was admirable, the performance found no favour with the elect, it being obvious that Wilkes was incompetent. "Pooh, pooh!" sneered Porson, the famous Grecian, "it is like its editor—of no character." The most noteworthy fact in connection with the book was a complimentary letter from Lord Mansfield, expressing his gratitude to his old enemy for sending him a copy.<sup>2</sup>

In June of this year Pitt dissolved Parliament and

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 218-25; *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 49-50, 466-7; *Gentleman's Magazine*, lx. 917; *Morning Post*, Aug. 23, 1788; *Biographies of Wilkes and Cobbett*, J. S. Watson, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 226-38; *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 68-9, 468; *Gentleman's Magazine*, lx. 1013; *Wilkes and Cobbett*, J. S. Watson, p. 106; *Table Talk of S. Rogers* (A. Dyce), p. 351.

appealed to the country. For some time the financial policy of the Government had been unpopular in the county of Middlesex, the transference of the Tobacco Duty from the Customs to the Excise being especially distasteful. Although Wilkes presented a petition to the House of Commons against the measure he did not vote for its rejection as his constituents had ordered, incurring thereby the fierce resentment of several important manufacturers. Forgetting all his claims upon their gratitude, a large body of malcontents determined to defeat their old member, selecting George Byng, the son of the former candidate, to oppose him.<sup>1</sup> With his usual adroitness Wilkes endeavoured to evade the issue in his address to the freeholders, emphasizing his long services of over twenty years and resuscitating the ancient battle-cry of representative reform and shorter Parliaments. Yet on the eve of the poll he did not scruple to enrage the enemies of the "Tobacco Act" still further by going down to Westminster to oppose Charles Fox, who was their champion, ascending the hustings amidst a storm of hisses and groans to plump for his ancient antagonist, Parson Horne.<sup>2</sup>

The nomination of candidates for the county of Middlesex took place at the Mermaid Tavern in Hackney on Friday, the 25th of June. So great was the crowd of freeholders that the Sheriff adjourned the meeting from the large room to the bowling green. Never before had Wilkes beheld such a vast array of hostile faces. Never before had the old general been unable to crush a mutiny. His address was short and uninspired, merely a spiritless plea that he had always faithfully discharged the trust they had imposed on him. No shouts of applause greeted the appearance of

<sup>1</sup> *The World*, March 20 and June 17, 1790; *The Gazetteer*, June 18, 19, and 26, 1790; *Representative History*, T. H. B. Oldfield, iv, 180; cf. *Life of Pitt*, Lord Stanhope, ii, 32-3; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1847), Part I, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,895, f. 92; *Life of Sheridan*, Thomas Moore, ii, 120; *The World*, June 18, 1790.

the familiar red coat. The hoarse, inarticulate speech ended amidst sullen silence. Immediately he had finished the solicitor of a society of tobacco manufacturers addressed the meeting, charging Wilkes with having deserted the House on the day when he was instructed by his constituents to oppose the new taxes. It was an instance of the engineer hoist with his own petard, for the old demagogue had encouraged the constituencies in former days to regard their representatives as merely delegates. In vain he pleaded that "out of eleven divisions against the Excise he had voted in nine, once being absent through ill-health and once owing to business." The vast assembly of the freeholders of Middlesex had lost faith in their old idol, and when Wilkes was proposed as a fit and proper person to represent them in Parliament a few hands only were shown in his favour. Oddly enough, the exact number was forty-five.<sup>1</sup>

Quite different was the reception of William Mainwaring's name, for he was sound on the tobacco question, and hundreds of palms were held up on his behalf. Young Byng, however, was the hero of the day, a tempest of cheers greeting his appearance on the platform, and it was plain enough that his show of hands was by far the greatest. Under the circumstances the Sheriff had no difficulty in deciding upon whom the nomination had fallen. To the surprise of his friends Wilkes refused to demand a poll, perceiving that his chances were hopeless. In a few husky words the old man announced that he would not "disturb the peace of the county by a contested election," and then, while the voters were cheering themselves hoarse at the success of Byng and Mainwaring, he stole quietly away. Though his heart was sore he betrayed no sign of emotion, not even writing a farewell address, but contenting him-

<sup>1</sup> *The World*, July 8, 1790; *Public Advertiser*, June 25 and 26, 1790; *London Chronicle*, June 24 and 26, 1790; *The Gazetteer*, June 18, 19, 26, and 29, 1790; *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 111; Add. MS. 30,895, f. 95.

self with a laconic advertisement merely thanking his supporters for their attendance at the Mermaid Tavern. To a few familiar friends sometimes he confessed his disappointment. "I should much have liked," he used to say, "to have died in my gears."<sup>1</sup>

Encouraged by the success of Mr. Byng, the dour John Cowley made an attempt to eject Wilkes from the position of Chamberlain at the next annual election. Of late the old member for Middlesex had been causing grave dissatisfaction in the City, his persistency in remaining an alderman although an official of the corporation giving offence to many of the Livery, while a recent grant of £600, said to be due to him for money that he had advanced, was arousing much hostile criticism. The citizens of London, however, had a deeper sense of gratitude than the freeholders of the county. To the good-humoured crowd that thronged Guildhall on Midsummer Day, it seemed an act of meanness to deprive the old man of his place. All knew that he was an upright and an assiduous Chamberlain, by far the most illustrious that had ever occupied the position. So the envious Cowley had but "a small show of hands," and did not venture to challenge a poll. No one was more delighted at the result than James Boswell, who was present on the hustings. "All Scotland, my dear sir, will rejoice at your triumph!" he cried, as he shook his old friend by the hand. To few men did the whirligig of Time bring more ample revenges than to John Wilkes.<sup>2</sup>

At his first appearance as candidate for the Chamberlainship Wilkes had promised to devote one-third of his salary (if he was elected) towards the liquidation of his debts.<sup>3</sup> For many years after his appointment to the

<sup>1</sup> *The World*, July 8, 1790; *The Gazetteer*, July 6, 1790; Add. MS. 30,895, f. 94; *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MSS. 30,895, ff. 95-8, 100; *Morning Post*, Jan. 12, Feb. 19, March 4, June 11, 14, and 27, July 1, 1791.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Feb. 21, 1776; *Morning Post*, Dec. 23, 1779.



lucrative office all his surplus income was absorbed by his old creditors, and nearly a decade had passed before he was able to boast that "patience and economy were bringing their rewards."<sup>1</sup> At the time of his discovery of Sandham cottage a great improvement had taken place in his financial position, and henceforth the flow of letters from importunate duns finally ceased. When at last he was free from debt he could regard himself as a rich man. In addition to his own splendid salary Miss Wilkes now possessed a large fortune inherited from her mother, said to exceed £2000 a year.<sup>2</sup> Unhappily for those dependent upon him, his extravagance kept pace with the increase of his prosperity, for he was incapable temperamentally of practising economy.

Dissatisfied with his old home in Prince's Court, he was anxious to possess "a complete town residence," regarding himself as "fully equal" to the expense of a larger establishment. After some hesitation his choice fell upon No. 30 Grosvenor Square, a sunny house at the corner of South Audley Street, where he took up his abode on the eve of his contest with John Cowley.<sup>3</sup> Many costly alterations were carried out, the owner's tawdry and extravagant taste being evident throughout the spacious mansion. To the admiration of all her friends, Polly also took a share in the decorations, painting all the front windows with oriental designs, occupying four years over the laborious task.<sup>4</sup> Wilkes showed the greatest pride in his new home, and was able to give much larger entertainments. His dinner parties, however, were usually small ones, it being his maxim that to be comfortable they "should never consist

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30873, f. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Morning Post*, March 19, 1802; Miss Wilkes's Will, vide *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 105-16.

<sup>3</sup> *The Squares of London*, E. Beresford Chancellor, p. 28; *London Past and Present*, H. B. Wheatley, iii. 164; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iv. 64, 68; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 87. No. 30 is now numbered No. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 46; *Morning Post*, June 13, 1794.

of more than the number of the Muses, nor of less than that of the Graces." <sup>1</sup>

Fortunately for Polly she possessed an excellent trustee to prevent her from being infected by her father's extravagance—one Joseph Paice, a merchant living at No. 27 Bread Street Hill, acclaimed by the prince of British essayists as "the finest gentleman of his time." So habitual was his chivalry that he would stand hat in hand while he answered a poor servant girl who chanced to ask him the way. Or, sometimes, he might be seen escorting a market woman through a shower, holding his umbrella over her basket of fruit lest it should be spoilt by the rain.<sup>2</sup> An example of perfect altruism, he had distributed his fortune among poor relations, merely retaining for himself enough to live on. He had never married, owing to a love disappointment in early youth, but, as though in compensation for the lack of domestic ties, he was the guardian of no less than a hundred wards, so widespread was the confidence in his integrity. In dress he was the most prim of old beaux, always wearing lace shirt-frill and ruffles, with an embroidered waistcoat and gold knee-buckles, his hair carefully powdered and tied in a queue. To this estimable Mr. Paice the spendthrift Wilkes often proved a sore anxiety, but he protected the interests of the daughter with tact and firmness, while remaining on the best of terms with her volatile father.<sup>3</sup>

From time to time there were rumours that Wilkes would be rewarded for his services to the Government. At first it was reported that he might be knighted, and then an imaginative journalist announced that he would be created a baronet.<sup>4</sup> No doubt the old man would have

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 477 n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Essays of Elia* (A. Ainger, 1889), p. 115; *English Merchants*, H. R. Fox Bourne, ii. 240.

<sup>3</sup> *Family Pictures*, Anne Manning, pp. 19-54; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 33, 37, 81, 184, 196, 207, 231, 279, iv. 207; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 94-5, 96-7, 105, 106, 116; *Wilkes's Diary*, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *The World*, Dec. 4, 1790; *Morning Post*, Aug. 5, 1791.

been gratified by either honour, but having had no party at his back in the City or in Parliament since his conversion to Toryism, political exigencies never demanded his exaltation. Yet, it is doubtful whether under any circumstances a dignity could have been conferred on him. George the Third had a sense of humour, and would have considered that he was making a very bad joke in creating such a title as Sir John Wilkes.

No one was more deeply shocked by the horrors of the French Revolution than the old demagogue. He declared scornfully that the Government of France was not a democracy but "a mob-ocracy."<sup>1</sup> Whenever the subject was mentioned he poured forth a torrent of abuse against the republic. "The late barbarities in France exceeded those even of their own St. Barthelemy," he wrote to his daughter as early as July 1790. "I scarcely think that the history of mankind can furnish scenes more truly horrid and comic than in the neighbouring nation of monkeys and tigers, as Voltaire calls the French," he remarked two years later. Although despising the folly and indolence of Louis XVI he was full of sympathy for the poor queen. Marat he loathed, exulting greatly when he fell beneath the knife of Charlotte Corday. He was filled with delight whenever misfortune overtook "the bloody savages at Paris."<sup>2</sup> It never seems to have occurred to him that France was animated by the same spirit of revolt that had swept over England and America a generation before, and that the revolution in both continents had been precipitated (if not inspired) by the volcanic period of "Wilkes and Liberty." From the seeds of the first great storm others had reaped the tempest.<sup>3</sup>

By the irony of chance the last mob that Wilkes ever saw, though composed entirely of his fellow-imperialists,

<sup>1</sup> *Diary of Madame D'Arblay* (A. Dobson), iv. 340.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iv. 36, 60, 93, 96, 120, 135, 148, 153, 163.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 243-5, *ante*.

was the first to do him an injury. When the news of Lord Howe's great victory in the battle of Cape St. Vincent reached London the town was illuminated, and crowds of uproarious patriots thronged the streets until far into the night. At one period the demonstration became a riot, a gang of "alarmists," who favoured a sort of general conscription, inciting the people to attack the houses of unpopular politicians. Either by mistake or because he had failed to support a scheme of national defence at a recent meeting of the Common Council, a portion of the mob selected Wilkes as a victim of their displeasure. A shower of stones flew through the air, and in a few moments his beautiful plate-glass windows, upon which his daughter had laboured for so many years, lay in fragments upon the carpet. Though he regretted his loss he bore it with much good humour, refusing to prosecute any of the rioters. "They are only," he said with a smile, "some of my old *pupils*, now set up for themselves."<sup>1</sup>

One of the penalties of his new prosperity was a shoal of begging letters. All through life it was his fate to be associated with many who eventually became bankrupt. Yet he seldom bestowed much charity upon these unfortunates, partly because his own extravagant habits left him with little margin, and partly because most of the lame ducks were beyond salvation.<sup>2</sup> Some of his old allies, however, found him a generous friend, like Sam Petrie of Tokenhouse Yard, one of his most stalwart supporters in the City, who was obliged to flee the country to avoid imprisonment for debt. By his own relatives, too, he was greatly harassed. The peripatetic Israel met with no success in the West Indies, returning to England and then

<sup>1</sup> *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 46; *Morning Post*, April 19, June 13 and 24, 1794; *Bon Ton Magazine*, iv. 156.

<sup>2</sup> In 1763 Churchill had apostrophised him thus:

" . . . Nature gave thee, open to distress,  
A heart to pity, and a hand to bless."

—*The Prophecy of Famine.*

emigrating to New York, looking always to brother John to settle his financial difficulties. The incompetent Heaton was usually insolvent, the coal business proving as unremunerative as the family distillery, and the house at Prince's Court, whither he had removed in 1791, being too expensive an establishment. Various nephews, also, seemed as much in need of pecuniary assistance as their parents, while, owing to the parsimony of the eccentric Mrs. Hayley, the favourite niece was often living in comparative poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Jack Smith, after a disastrous start, was now doing well in the service of the East India Company. In Germany he had been always in debt, and finding that his father could not afford to put him into a Prussian regiment he was obliged to accept a clerkship in an office in Hamburg. Soon perceiving that he had no taste for business, Wilkes recalled him to London, when to his dismay he found that he was as much like a German in manner and appearance as he had been like a French boy on his return from Paris. Nominated to a cadetship in the Bengal Cavalry, the young man sailed to India in 1782, where, although he had to wait eighteen years for a captaincy, he was always happy and contented. Whenever possible Wilkes gave him letters of introduction to his superior officers.<sup>2</sup>

Ever since he had been Chamberlain the old man had employed his leisure moments in writing the history of his life. "It will be published," he used to tell his friends, "after my *ascension*."<sup>3</sup> To a chosen few he used to read sometimes portions of these memoirs, the auditors being always most eulogistic. Imitating the candour of Rousseau, without his neurotic introspection, he endeavoured

<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS. 30,873-5, *passim*; *Memoirs of Lætitia Hawkins*, ii. 5; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iv. 84.

<sup>2</sup> War Office Records; Add. MSS. 30,872, ff. 116, 181, 202, 203, 220, 276; 30,873, ff. 38, 78, 134; 30,874, ff. 47, 77; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 267; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 117-39; *History of the Isle of Wight*, W. H. D. Adams, p. 203; *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 111.

<sup>3</sup> *Table Talk of S. Rogers* (A. Dyce), p. 236; Add. MS. 32,567, f. 233.

to tell the true story of John Wilkes, taking an obvious pleasure in his confessions. Since he had a sense of style and the gift of portraiture, and was also the most audacious of humourists, he should have written the greatest autobiography that the world has ever seen, for it was the narrative of a most amazing life by one who did not shrink from self-revelation. Unhappily, only a small portion has been preserved. Although often florid and affected, it contains numerous graceful passages with some shrewd comments upon men and affairs, while the personality of Gertrude Corradini stands forth as clearly in its pages as any of the characters of Jean Jacques.<sup>1</sup>

In these later years a visit to Sandham Cottage became a fashionable pilgrimage, all those who made the tour of the Isle of Wight being anxious to see the "villakin" and its famous tenant. Like Voltaire at Ferney, he loved to have a little court of admirers around him. In all his references to the past there was not the least suspicion of rancour, it being his habit to refer to his own career as if he was speaking of another man. "Now, I'll tell you a story of what happened in the late John Wilkes's time," was the usual preface to some humorous reminiscence. Yet he never forgot that he had passed through a hard struggle. Once a guest happened to ask how he would like to go through his political life again.

"Not at all," he replied. "Adversity may be a good thing to breakfast on; nay, a man may dine upon it; but

<sup>1</sup> Two volumes of these memoirs are preserved in the Brit. Mus. (Add. MSS. 30,865). They were privately printed by W. F. Taylor in 1888 (Harrow, 16mo), under the title of *John Wilkes, Patriot: An Unfinished Autobiography*. See p. 164, *ante*. Tradition says that the rest of the manuscript was destroyed by Miss Wilkes after her father's death. Vide *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 110-11; *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 479, 480; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 183, ii. 200; *The Isle of Wight*, E. B. James, ii. 546; *The Percy Anecdotes*, R. and S. Percy, ii. 88; *The World*, Oct. 8 and 29, Nov. 26, 1787; *Morning Post*, June 27, 1788; *The Oracle*, Jan. 3, 1798; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1802), Part I, p. 467.

believe me, my good friend, it makes a confoundedly bad supper.”<sup>1</sup>

To the last he was fond of deprecating his personal appearance. One of his favourite anecdotes was of a certain lottery office-keeper, who offered him ten guineas not to pass his window while the tickets were being drawn, intimating that his evil eye might bring bad luck upon the house.<sup>2</sup>

“But I did not make myself,” he used to remark, “and, being only tenant for life I am not liable for what the lawyers call permissive waste.”<sup>3</sup>

Often in jest he loved to reiterate that he had always been a favourite with women notwithstanding his ugliness, repeating the familiar phrase: “It only takes me half an hour to talk away my face.”

On market day in the summer time he was frequently to be seen in Newport, walking arm in arm with a faithful friend named William Sharpe, who, like John Dell in former years, was always willing to fetch and carry for him; or standing in the porch of the old Bugle Inn to watch the crowd pass by, casting an appreciative glance upon all the pretty farmers’ daughters, who were famous far and wide for their beauty.<sup>4</sup>

The flight of time did not seem to diminish his “luxurious imagination” in the least degree, and when seventy years of age the old pagan was engaged in a new amour with “a juvenile Dulcinea.” The name of the girl was Sally Barry, and her home was in Dean Street, where for the space of two years Wilkes continued to visit her periodically. As late as September 1795 a journalist referred to the liaison. “Alderman Wilkes is *finishing* his Essay on Woman in the neighbourhood of Soho; but

<sup>1</sup> *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 227, 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of F. Reynolds*, ii. 106; *Century of Anecdote*, J. Timbs, i. 165.

<sup>3</sup> *Réms. of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 407 n.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of F. Reynolds*, ii. 106; *The Oracle*, Aug. 19, 1797.



QUONDAM

A FRIEND TO LIBERTY

*As polite as if one eye  
Upon the other were a spy*

OK - Ag. for 1997





it is a *weak and miserable* performance.”<sup>1</sup> All the while, nevertheless, he remained devoted to the placid Mrs. Arnold, visiting Kensington Gore at least once a week, always behaving to her with kindness and consideration. And to his little Harriet, who was now a delightful playmate, he was the best of fathers.

“Nothing is so fatiguing as the life of a wit,” Mrs. Thrale used to say. “Garrick and Wilkes are the two oldest men of their ages I know, for they have both worn themselves out by being eternally on the rack to give entertainment to others.”<sup>2</sup> Still, in spite of his bent figure and wrinkled face, the old patriot was blessed with tissue of steel, unimpaired as yet by the struggles and dissipations of his turbulent life. Although it may have seemed as if old age had come upon him prematurely years ago, his health continued to be excellent, and he was able to take his daily walk to and from the Guildhall until the end of his days. Riding, of which he was always so fond, he had given up some years before, as well as bathing in the sea. Much to his sorrow, Polly was often ailing at this period, being troubled with a delicate throat, and sometimes losing her voice for several weeks.<sup>3</sup>

Until late in life he still retained much of his old fascination for the common folk, who remembered with gratitude how he had fought against their oppressors. One hot day in summer he was standing in the street with Henry Swinburne, mopping his brow as he talked, when a drummer and his son walked past.

“What a queer-looking bald fellow that was,” whispered the boy.

“Don’t you know him?” replied the father. “’Tis

<sup>1</sup> Wilkes’s *Diary* for 1794-5, *vide* Add. MS. 30,866; *Bon Ton Magazine*, v. 275-6; *cf.* Add. MS. 32,566, f. 153, for an anecdote related by Mitford.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary of Madame D’Arblay* (A. Dobson), ii. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iv. 43, 75, 86, 88, 118; *cf.* *Morning Post*, March 15, 1802.

Johnny Wilkes; and that bald head has more brains in it than all our regiments put together, drummers and all!"<sup>1</sup>

In spite, too, of the existence of Amelia Arnold his social position was higher during the last dozen years of his life than it had been at any other period. Since he had become a royal favourite the doors of the great hostesses were no longer closed to him. The fastidious Mrs. Montagu insisted that he should be among the first to visit her wonderful new house.<sup>2</sup> Even the pious Hannah More allowed that he "was very entertaining."<sup>3</sup> With most of his old enemies he was now at peace, James Townsend, the most violent of all, being reconciled to him while they were the guests of Lord Shelburne for a few days at Bowood Park. But for the untimely death of the vindictive Oliver there is little doubt that Wilkes would have made him a friend long ago.

Of his little home in the Isle of Wight the old man never seemed to tire, spending every summer there from the year 1788 till the year 1797. On one of the last occasions that he crossed the Solent the wind failed, and he complained of the length of the passage, which occupied three hours. "Nothing has been so obnoxious to me through life," he grumbled, "as a dead calm."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he returned on the same date in the following year, staying until the 27th of August. On the way back to London, with Miss Wilkes as his companion, he visited Arundel, Petworth, and Cobham.

While he was apparently in good health his friends, perceiving how much thinner he had grown, began to fear that he was attacked by a marasmus.<sup>5</sup> Although able still

<sup>1</sup> *Courts of Europe*, H. Swinburne, i. 398.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iv. 108, 119; *Morning Post*, May 16, 1791.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Correspondence of Hannah More*, ii. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *The Isle of Wight*, E. B. James, ii. 547; cf. *Wilkes's Diary*, July 9, 1796, vide Add. MS. 30,866. The passage from Portsmouth to Ryde seems usually to have taken from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half.

<sup>5</sup> *Annual Register* (1797), p. 377.

to walk to his office he had lost much of his energy in recent months, and went to dinner-parties less frequently. In mind he was as active as ever, enjoying life to the full, but quite aware that it was drawing to a close. On his seventieth birthday he had remarked that in reality he was entering into *his 141st year*, "for," said he, "I have always lived two days in one."<sup>1</sup> No gloomy thoughts disturbed his cheery optimism.

On the 28th of November it was his duty as Chamberlain of London to deliver the usual address when the Freedom of the City was presented to Sir Horatio Nelson for his great victory at the battle of Cape St. Vincent in the preceding February. It was an impressive scene, though the onlookers scarcely can have realised its full significance. The old demagogue, bowed and shrunken, upon whom the shadow of death was resting, had influenced the spirit of his age more deeply than any other living man. The gallant sailor, with his sightless eye, and the empty sleeve pinned across his breast, was destined to live in history as one of the most glorious of the nation's heroes.<sup>2</sup>

Seven days later, on the 5th of December, there was a similar ceremony, the recipient of the honour on this occasion being Admiral Waldegrave. The Chamberlain's speech was shorter than usual, like that in which he had addressed Nelson a week previously, for his voice was no longer capable of a sustained effort. But there was no sign of mental lassitude, and despite his cadaverous aspect no sooner had the old man spoken the preliminary words, "I give you joy," than it was evident that he was still full of life and spirit.<sup>3</sup>

But it was his last appearance at a public function. A few days later he was confined to his room with a chill,

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 476 n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 212; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1797), p. 1121.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (1798), Part I, p. 73; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 165.

and soon he was not well enough to leave his bed. It was evident that he could not rally, his vitality having been undermined at length by the ravages of senile decay. Although he knew that his days were numbered he had no fear of death, observing that it was "one of the conditions of human nature, which mankind must generally submit to at the age of threescore years and ten."<sup>1</sup> From the first he was cheerful and resigned, acquiescing without complaint in the inevitable. Impenitent as ever, he loved to crack a ribald joke with his medical attendant.<sup>2</sup>

Though his strength had gone his mind was undimmed, and he was conscious of all around him. To the servants who waited in the sick-room he was always most grateful, thanking them repeatedly for their care and attention. Occasionally, in his hoarse quavering voice, he would declaim some passages from the last dialogue of Mathias's *Pursuits of Literature*, of which he was a great admirer.<sup>3</sup> Lying free from pain, he was able to read or to be read to. Yet, there was no need of books to while away the hours, for the memories of the past were of far more interest than any other story. Wonderful pictures must have flashed through his brain as he lay slowly sinking to his death, those great historical scenes in which he himself had played the chief rôle. Wonderful faces must have seemed to look down upon him, dead heroes who had been his friends or his enemies, and beautiful women whom he had loved and forsaken.

There was one face upon which his eyes could always rest. His devoted Polly never left his bedside, ever on the watch to anticipate his slightest wish, unwilling to lose a single moment of his companionship. Sick at heart, but with smiling lips, she sat patiently by his couch, maintaining with undaunted courage her unequal contest against

<sup>1</sup> *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 229.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 32,568, f. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 90, 165, 229.

death. Once more they spent Christmas Day together, for he lingered until the following evening, conscious to the last. Late in the afternoon of Tuesday, the 26th of December, he asked Polly to give him something to drink. Taking the cup in his hands he looked towards her with his old habit of gallantry, and murmured loud enough for her to hear that he drank to the health of his "beloved and excellent daughter." A little later he passed away calmly and without pain.

So died John Wilkes at the age of seventy-two. Although he had outlived the majority of his contemporaries, and had been seen in public so seldom during recent years, his death created no little stir in the world. Long obituary notices appeared in the newspapers and magazines, many of them giving a full biographical account of his career. In recent times the public prints had never paid so much attention to the decease of any other celebrity.<sup>1</sup>

At first, it was believed that the Chamberlain had left a considerable sum of money. In his will, which was signed less than three years previously, he had presumed apparently that he was worth at least £4000. With kind forethought he had bequeathed small legacies to the clerks in his office, as well as to his servants, besides leaving the sums of £1000 and £2000 respectively to Mrs. Arnold and his daughter Harriet. Yet, to the surprise of his executors, it was found that he was insolvent, having lived in his usual careless fashion to the full extent of his income until the last. Still, his humble beneficiaries were not allowed to

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 88; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 127; *London Chronicle*, Dec. 26-8, 1797; *True Briton*, Dec. 30, 1797, Jan. 26, 1798; *Times*, Dec. 27; *Morning Chronicle*, Dec. 29; *General Evening Post*, Dec. 29; *Morning Herald*, Dec. 30, 1797; *The Oracle*, Jan. 1, 2, 3, 1798; *Annual Register* (1797), pp. 58, 369; *Scots Magazine*, lx. 75, 153; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 17, 85, 163, 225; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1797); p. 1077, (1798) pp. 77, 124; *Monthly Mirror* (1798), p. 64, *Lady's Magazine* (1798), pp. 45, 48, 93.

be disappointed, the inestimable Polly making up the deficiency out of her own fortune.<sup>1</sup>

The body of Wilkes was laid to rest in a vault in Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street, on the 4th January, according to the instructions of his will, which ordered that he should be buried in the parish where he died. Since he had expressed a desire that the ceremony should take place "in great privacy," the hearse was followed by only three mourning coaches in addition to Miss Wilkes's private carriage. Besides a few relations like Heaton Wilkes and Robert Baker none but the most intimate friends, such as John Nichols and Joseph Paice, were invited to the funeral. The body was carried from the door of the chapel to the grave by eight poor workmen, who each received a guinea as well as a new suit of black clothes. A plain marble tablet marks his tomb at the east end of the north gallery, with the appropriate inscription, written by himself: NEAR THIS PLACE ARE INTERRED THE REMAINS OF JOHN WILKES. A FRIEND OF LIBERTY.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of J. Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 90-5, 105-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of J. Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 88; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 127; Registers of St. George's, Hanover Square; *London Past and Present*, H. B. Wheatley, i. 80. The coffin plate is said to have been engraved with his arms: "Or, a chevron Sable between three crows' heads erased, coloured proper; charged with an escutcheon of pretence, Sable, a chevron Or, between three pelicans vulnerating Or. Crest on a mount Vert, a cross-bow stringed Or; with the motto on a scroll, *Arms meo non confido*." *Gentleman's Magazine* (1798), p. 81. There is no record, however, at Herald's College to show that Wilkes was entitled to bear arms.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE VERDICT OF POSTERITY

#### I

THE posthumous fame of few public men has been influenced more adversely by political prejudice than that of John Wilkes. It was natural that it should be so. At one time or another in his turbulent career he was the *bête noire* of both Whig and Tory, each party in turn having a grievance against him. In both cases, as always, it was not his services but his offences that were remembered. For this reason, strange though it may seem, he is perhaps the only great English politician who left no faithful adherents to take care of his reputation.

The political Regira of 1784, when he crossed over to the Government benches, did not arouse the least gratitude among the Tories. A burst of hilarity followed this strangest of vicissitudes, but there was no cause for jubilation. An "exhausted volcano" already, he brought no strength to his new party. Not a single colleague came with him, and he was of no use in debate. During his allegiance to Pitt he did not deliver one serviceable speech on behalf of the administration, while he failed to keep his seat immediately he was called upon to defend it. Thus, the Tory writers, having no reason to be proud of his adherence, devote their attention to his performances as a demagogue, consequently saying little that is favourable of his career. From Adolphus to John Selby Watson the Conservative historians have taken a low estimate of Wilkes's char-



acter, denying that he possessed either honesty or great abilities.<sup>1</sup>

Among the Whigs there was even less respect for his memory. Although aware that he had saved the party from extinction by creating an auxiliary force from the ranks of Radicalism, they could not forget that he had always been left outside the pale by their leaders, who regarded him with jealousy and suspicion. A still worse blot darkened his political fame. The unpardonable sin of the renegade lay at his door, and he was never forgiven for going over to the enemy at one of the most critical periods in the history of Whiggism. Every statesman who changes sides has endured similar odium. All others, however, except Wilkes, have found capable apologists among the members of their new party.

One of the first of his detractors was a great Whig Lord Chancellor, whose own career, oddly enough, exhibits many of the defects that he imputed to the member for Middlesex. In order to enhance the reputation of other Whig statesmen it was convenient to depreciate the fame of Wilkes, so Lord Brougham endeavoured to prove that he was a thorough hypocrite, who "always pandered to the appetites of the mob." Yet to the modern reader the criticism as a whole will seem ineffective. To declare that "he had spent all his fortune before he gained popular favour" is a wild exaggeration, and the taunt that he "lived for years like a mendicant on patriotic subscriptions" is applicable also to every popular politician whose income has been provided by enthusiastic admirers. It is curious, too, that the writer, who was one of the ugliest men of his time, should speak maliciously of another's "inhuman squint and demoniac grin." To suggest, moreover, that "strict moral conduct, regular religious habits, and temperate, prudent behaviour"

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, John Adolphus, i. 122-41, 338-52, 385-416, 484-97; ii. 10-11, 205, 252-4, 312; iii. 146-8; *Biographies of Wilkes and Cobbett*, J. S. Watson, pp. 108-14.

were qualities that were "generally required of public men" in the middle of the eighteenth century indicated an imperfect acquaintance with the manners and customs of the period. Apparently the object of Brougham's diatribe was to emphasize the orthodox Whig tradition with regard to the character and accomplishments of John Wilkes.<sup>1</sup>

The cry was taken up by the great Whig Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, whose verdict against the demagogue was equally severe. "A profligate spendthrift," he dubbed him, "without opinions or principles, religious or political; whose impudence far exceeded his talents, and who always meant licence when he cried liberty."<sup>2</sup> Thus, within fifty years of Wilkes's death, he had been repudiated most emphatically in the name of Whiggism by two of the most illustrious of Whig statesmen.

Macaulay, writing at this period, did not join in the chorus of disapproval, since he was "dusting the jacket" of George Grenville, but his references to the member for Aylesbury are invariably patronising and cavalier. "One of the most profane, licentious, and agreeable rakes," he calls him, "the delight of green-rooms and taverns." Little but what is trivial and superfluous is told of the man, and the great essayist ignored the fact that he was describing one of the most important constitutional developments in the history of England.<sup>3</sup>

Later writers on the Whig side have been more generous in their acknowledgment of Wilkes's services, but they seldom speak of him without contempt, and none of them form a high opinion of his abilities. While admitting that "there is no historical name which is identified with precedents of such singular importance," Thorold Rogers obviously infers that the man was a charlatan, protesting

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Sketches of Statesmen of the Time of George III.* Henry, Lord Brougham, 3rd series, pp. 181-95.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bedford Correspondence*, III. lii.

<sup>3</sup> *Critical and Historical Essays*, Lord Macaulay, *vide* Essay on the Earl of Chatham,

that "he was always in the market."<sup>1</sup> John Richard Green and Franck Bright, two of the most widely read of modern historians, have adopted a similar attitude, the former calling Wilkes "a worthless profligate," while the latter denounces him as "a scurrilous writer of most licentious morals."<sup>2</sup> Obviously the old Whig tradition, fostered by Brougham and Lord John Russell, has prevented many earnest inquirers from doing justice to one of the most conspicuous characters of the eighteenth century.

Meanwhile the inevitable reaction had taken place. Soon after the Whig magnates had spoken Charles Wentworth Dilke wrote an eloquent apology for Wilkes, attempting even the impossible task of extenuating his share in the "Essay on Woman," but doing a good work by showing the futility and ingratitude of trying to blacken the character of a man who had performed a great constitutional service.<sup>3</sup> Not long afterwards a judicious essay by Fraser Rae gave the first adequate account of the demagogue's career, proving his claim to permanent recognition.<sup>4</sup> A little later, the most scholarly by far, as well as the most attractive of all the descriptions of the life of the patriot, was contained in Sir George Trevelyan's *Early History of Charles James Fox*, which took for its text the words of Gladstone that the name of Wilkes must be enrolled among the great champions of English freedom.<sup>5</sup> Finally, a complete biography in two volumes, written with much care and elaboration of detail, was published by Mr. Percy Fitzgerald.<sup>6</sup>

To a large extent these latter works are devoted to the task of rehabilitating the personal character of Wilkes and justifying his political attitude. No sincere attempt

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Gleanings*, J. E. Thorold Rogers, pp. 179, 183.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the English People*, John Richard Green, iv. 220; *A History of England*, J. Franck Bright, iii. 1043.

<sup>3</sup> *Papers of a Critic*, C. W. Dilke, ii. 229-79.

<sup>4</sup> *Wilkes, Sheridan, Fox*, W. F. Rae, pp. 1-139.

<sup>5</sup> *Early History of Charles James Fox*, G. O. Trevelyan, pp. 160-276.

<sup>6</sup> *The Life and Times of John Wilkes, M.P.*, Percy Fitzgerald, 1888.

is made to determine his position in history. Trevelyan, indeed, deems him "far from great," and even Dilke speaks of his "dead and forgotten reputation." In the opinion of the present writer the narrative that has been set forth in these pages demonstrates beyond all question that the hero of so many doughty deeds has an indisputable claim to eminence; or, as a natural corollary, that "a great champion of English freedom" must have been a great man.

## II

"The Spirit of the Age is the very thing that a great man changes."

"But does he not rather avail himself of it?" inquired Coningsby.

"Parvenus do," rejoined his companion, "but not prophets, great legislators, great conquerors. They destroy and they create."<sup>1</sup>

Upon this test of greatness, enunciated by a great statesman, Wilkes's title is secure. Probably no other of his contemporaries influenced more powerfully the Spirit of the Age. Alone and unbidden, he raised the standard of revolt against arbitrary power in his own land. The inspiration of his example, passing across the Atlantic, helped to precipitate the War of Independence, returning later as a fiercer spirit still to provoke the cataclysm of the French Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

The axiom of Disraeli—which is the axiom also of an historical school of hero-worshippers, who imagine that some great conqueror or some great legislator must ride in the whirlwind and direct the storm of all great events in history—is opposed to the theories of a school of historic fatalists, who regard every phenomenon in the life of nations as the result of an inevitable law of chance. There is no

<sup>1</sup> *Coningsby*, B. Disraeli, Book III, ch. i.

<sup>2</sup> The files of the principal American newspapers in 1764, and again in 1768-9, show how deeply the Colonists were impressed by the "Case of Mr. Wilkes." Cf. *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 107.

reason why the disciples of this latter creed should deny that Wilkes was a great man. Even though he was but one of the natural products of the Spirit of the Age, the mere figurehead of the ship of progress, borne along by an irresistible tide, it was his banner that was the outward and visible sign of a great social revolt, and under his standard there was always victory.

His achievements were indeed stupendous. In his successful agitation against the principle of a General Warrant, he vindicated for all time the great clause in Magna Charta which enacted that "No free man shall be taken or imprisoned, or outlawed, or exiled, or anyways destroyed; nor will we go upon him, nor will we send upon him, unless by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land."<sup>1</sup> Although imprisonment without trial could not have become common, the judicial system being placed on too firm a basis, such imprisonment was now made impossible, the decision of the Court of King's Bench upholding the contention of Wilkes.<sup>2</sup> More than this, with the exception of a brief period when the fear of Jacobinism seemed to call for stern methods of repression, there was no more persecution for political offences after a General Warrant was declared illegal. It was the proud privilege of John Wilkes to preserve one of the most essential principles of English liberty.

In his long struggle to efface the resolution of the House of Commons on the 17th of February, 1769, he won an even greater triumph. In this respect one of the ordinances of the Bill of Rights seemed at stake—the declaration "that the election of members of Parlyament ought to be free." Once and for all he vindicated the right of the people to select their own Parliamentary representatives, and from this time onward the House of Commons has never attempted

<sup>1</sup> *Select Charters*, William Stubbs, p. 301, c. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Lord Mansfield*, J. Holliday, pp. 141-2; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1765), p. 535.

to dictate to a constituency in regard to its choice. Not only is the result of the Middlesex Election a great constitutional landmark, in that it saved the electors from all danger of being told "whom they should choose," but it emphasized the principle, perhaps for the first time, that the sovereign power was vested not in Parliament, but in the "great public."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, growing out of the national protest against the tyranny of the Lower House there arose a definite desire for a more popular representation, a desire that Wilkes was one of the earliest to kindle and the most diligent to keep aflame. It is difficult to exaggerate the influence of the Middlesex election upon public opinion; it is difficult to exaggerate the services of its hero to the cause of constitutional reform.

Unquestionably no one did more also to obtain the freedom of the Press. In the pages of the *North Briton* he printed the full name of every person whom he mentioned, declining to conceal their identity as usual under an initial. In "No. 45" he asserted his right to criticise the King's Speech, while he never ceased to protest against the law of libel, under which the booksellers "lived always in a state of jeopardy, like soldiers fighting for their country." It was owing to the great indignation caused by his conviction for reprinting his paper that one of the greatest changes affecting the Newspaper Press was made in the Statute Book. Hitherto, as Lord Mansfield maintained in the year 1771, a jury had not the right to decide whether the publication was libellous, but only whether it had been published. To the nation at large this judgment was never acceptable, and twenty-one years later Fox was able to pass a new Libel Act, which placed the liberty of the Press under the protection of the jury by allowing them to determine what constitutes a libel. Equally important was the concession

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Gleanings*, J. E. Thorold Rogers, p. 183; *Law of the Constitution*, A. V. Dicey, pp. 31-2, 362; *Constitutional History of England*, T. Erskine May, ii. 26.

of the right of reporting the debates in Parliament, a reform that has increased the power of the newspapers in an immeasurable degree, helping to change entirely the relationship between the electorate and its representatives, and this reform, as already explained, was brought about principally by the courage and dexterity of John Wilkes.<sup>1</sup> The man who was able to vindicate two of the most vital clauses of the Great Charter and the Bill of Rights, besides striking off the fetters that impeded the Freedom of the Press, well deserves the title of the "Friend of Liberty."

In addition to these three great deeds, Wilkes did more than any other politician of his time to prevent George the Third from becoming an absolute monarch. Without his opposition it is probable that the king would have overthrown "the principles of the Revolution" still more effectually, and made himself even more independent of parliamentary restraint. Not only did Wilkes make a personal protest against the new policy, but he created a party to oppose it, and helped to make that party the formidable force it became by managing it on a splendid system of organisation.<sup>2</sup> If we are to judge a man by his fruits he is entitled to rank among the most illustrious of the period.

### III

In the hey-day of his career his opinions were half a century in advance of his time, and he was the pioneer of some of the most important measures that were realised in the reign of Queen Victoria. As it has been pointed out

<sup>1</sup> *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*, G. S. Veitch, pp. 25-6; *Early History of C. J. Fox*, Sir G. O. Trevelyan, pp. 334, 357-9; *Constitutional History of England*, T. Erskine May, ii. 39-49; *English Constitutional History*, T. P. Taswell-Langmead, pp. 771-4; *History of England*, W. E. H. Lecky, iii. 256-66; *Law and Custom of the Constitution*, Sir W. R. Anson (fourth edition), i. 164.

<sup>2</sup> *History of England*, W. E. H. Lecky, iii. 174-9; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 228.

previously, he was the first prominent politician to propose a bill for "a just and equal representation of the people of England in Parliament," and no doubt one of the reasons that he was able to follow the leadership of the younger Pitt was because that minister was in favour of a comprehensive scheme of reform.<sup>1</sup> In his last election address to the freeholders of Middlesex in the year 1790 he still advocated an extension of the franchise and a redistribution of seats.<sup>2</sup>

It is curious also to note that he was one of the earliest advocates of Free Trade. During the year 1772 he was the chairman of a committee appointed by the Common Council "to consider the most effectual means of lowering, or at all events of preventing an increase in, the price of corn." In his report on the 19th of November he boldly recommended "the free importation of grain."<sup>3</sup> Such a declaration was quite consistent with his principles, for during his Mayoralty he made many endeavours to lower the price of provisions. It was appropriate that he should approve of the doctrines of Adam Smith, since the great economist, although a Scotsman, was a warm admirer of "Wilkes and Liberty."<sup>4</sup>

True to his liberal principles, he was one of the first public men to suggest a reform of the criminal code, regarding it as unnecessarily cruel. In an address to the Livery of London, which he issued on the 28th of September, 1772, at the close of his Shrievalty, in conjunction with Alderman Bull, he inveighed eloquently against the wholesale executions. "We submit to you," ran the address, "whether it would not be expedient for you to instruct the representatives in Parliament of this city to move for a revision of those laws which inflict capital punishment

<sup>1</sup> *Genesis of Parliamentary Reform*, G. S. Veitch, p. 44; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1776), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,895, f. 92.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Nov. 20, 1772.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Adam Smith*, John Rae, p. 163.



for many inferior crimes, where mercy too seldom heals the rigour of justice. . . . It was our care, while we paid a due obedience to the laws now in force, to alleviate their harshness by lenity and tenderness to every unhappy object." <sup>1</sup>

Oddly enough the man who was destined to abolish many of these blood-stained laws believed that the member for Middlesex wished to retain them. It was at a dinner party thirteen years after Wilkes had been Sheriff that Sir Samuel Romilly formed this impression while listening to a spirited altercation between the ex-patriot and Count Mirabeau. The arguments of the Englishman, like those of Dr. Johnson on so many occasions, obviously were inspired by the spirit of contradiction, shaped in paradox for the purpose of exasperating his arrogant opponent, who quickly lost his temper. Wilkes appears to have used the extravagant argument that as the spectacle of capital punishment tended to make the spectators both brave and humane it was better that the severities of the criminal law should continue! <sup>2</sup> Yet there is no doubt that his real sentiments were contained in the public address which he wrote as Sheriff, and that he was talking nonsense on this last occasion for the pleasure of hearing the Frenchman's reply.

Had Wilkes been born fifty years later his liberal ideas must have given him an important place in the Government of his country. Or, if the great Reform Bill had been passed half a century earlier, it is certain that he would have taken a high position among the statesmen of his time in spite of his show of insincerity and lack of skill in debate. No general can win a decisive battle whose soldiers do not possess weapons as effective as those of the enemy, and the majority of Wilkes's troops were not armed with the vote.

<sup>1</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Sept. 28, 1772.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of Sir Samuel Romilly*, i. 61; cf. *Mirabeau's Letters during his Residence in England* (London, 1832), i. 90.

## IV

It is the veriest truism that a man may be great, as in the case of Napoleon, although he is immoral. It appears to have been the custom, however, to regard Wilkes as an exception to the general rule. Although not entitled to one of the highest places, such as Walpole, Chatham, or Burke, it is true nevertheless that he has been persistently under-rated. Few historical characters have been the victims of more hasty generalisation, too little attention having been paid to the details of his career. Unquestionably there was a spark of genius in the man, or he would never have made such a prodigious mark upon his age. The author of so many stupendous events must have possessed a great brain.

The greatest of men, however, not only inspire great deeds by their great example, but leave also a permanent impression upon their contemporaries. Nor is personal success essential, since the martyr who fails superbly may be reckoned on a higher plane than the conqueror. To this extent the shortcomings of Wilkes need not detract from his historical position. But the definition explains his limitations, showing why he does not reach the highest rank. The memory of his mission faded with his declension. He did not leave "the legacy of heroes; the memory of his great name and the inspiration of his great example."

The truth is that Wilkes was neither a great "conqueror" nor a great "martyr." He did not suffer very grievously for a cause, nor did he profit much through having undertaken it. If he had been a great orator like Fox or a great parliamentary leader like Pitt, the reproach of failure would not have clung to his reputation. Had he fallen like Hampden the lesson that he preached might have sunk more deeply into the hearts of his countrymen. The deeds that he wrought were splendid, but he has always

been reckoned far lower than his works. It was the fashion to separate, in the manner of Chatham, "the cause from the man."<sup>1</sup> In this respect Wilkes must be held to have failed, and for this reason, in spite of his association with so many historical triumphs, he cannot be given a place among the immortals.

It is usually an idle task to attempt to explain why any particular man has been unable to succeed, the cause of failure in the majority of cases being merely lack of character or want of ability. In this instance, however, since Wilkes was undoubtedly a man of genius, the reasons of his non-success, some of which have been noted already, are more difficult to discover.

Obviously his temperament was in many ways ill-suited to his career. It was incongruous that a stern patriot should be at the same time one of the greatest humorists of the day. A jest was often on his lips in place of a fierce denunciation of tyranny; instead of hating his enemies in good old-fashioned English style he never bore malice against one of them. It is doubtful, even at the height of his popularity, whether his most enthusiastic followers really believed in his sincerity, and it was owing to this feeling that many valuable adherents deserted him. It explains, of course, the ebb and flow of his power. Consequently, in spite of his personal magnetism the belief in the crusade was always greater than the trust in the man.

There are other reasons, too, why he was not the acknowledged prophet of a great cause, an unchallenged leader while alive, a hallowed memory when dead, like Charles Fox or Richard Cobden. His failure to become a great parliamentarian, which has been considered in a previous chapter,<sup>1</sup> gradually destroyed his influence in the country. Since an habitual contempt for the parochial, which is almost a national characteristic, has made the

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Shelburne*, Lord E. Fitzmaurice, i. 299.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XVII.

alderman the butt of the satirist, it was inevitable that he should lose prestige by his association with Guildhall. The petty squabbles of city politics sowed dissension amongst his supporters, while, during the last twenty years of his life, he was merely the salaried servant of the Livery of London, and believed by the nation at large to be kept in his situation for the sake of charity.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that he belonged to neither political party caused him to be more vulnerable to the attacks of his enemies, which, as he had aroused more animosities than any man of his day, were, as has been seen, most unmerciful and virulent. All through his life his debts, his profanity, and his immoralities were held up to public execration, and though no more vicious than many other statesmen of his age he has, in the words of an apologist, been made "the scapegoat for a generation."<sup>2</sup> When he had realised that he was unable to become a power in the House of Commons he seems to have been content to allow his influence in the country to fade away, glad to pass the evening of his life in easy epicurianism. Probably lack of ambition had a larger effect upon his career than any other influence, his not being the supreme greatness that is spurred to more intense effort the more difficult the obstacles. And thus, immediately he was withdrawn from the public gaze, his memory was forgotten.

## V

It would be unjust to accept the contemptuous generalisation that Wilkes was "always in the market."<sup>3</sup> On the first occasion, when he wished to be sent as ambassador to Constantinople, there was no question of shutting his mouth with a bribe, since his campaign against Lord Bute had not

<sup>1</sup> The newspapers, at least, convey this impression.

<sup>2</sup> *Papers of a Critic*, C. W. Dilke, ii. 229.

<sup>3</sup> *Literary Gleanings*, J. E. Thorold Rogers, p. 179.

yet begun.<sup>1</sup> In his application for the Governorship of Canada, to which the newspapers announced in error that he had been appointed in the spring of 1763, there was certainly a suggestion that he was willing to stop *The North Briton* if the ministers would make it worth his while, which makes this appear the most venal by far of all his political actions. In extenuation it can only be urged that he is said to have coveted the post for many years, alleging that it was his ambition "to have reconciled the new subjects to the English."<sup>2</sup> But when he applied a second time, in 1765, to be sent as British minister to Constantinople, he was guilty of no surrender of principle or disloyalty to his friends. Lord Rockingham being now in power, the office was in the gift of his own party. Since he had been an outlaw for two years there was no question of deserting his political colleagues. All the objects for which he had striven were now attained, General Warrants having been abolished for all time, and Bute ostracised from public life.<sup>3</sup>

No doubt his acceptance of a pension from the Whig ministers lowered his reputation in the eyes of many of his admirers, but he cannot be accused of a corrupt motive. The favour, which had been entirely unsolicited on his part, was forced upon him gratuitously, and accepted only as a "temporary provision" until he could be "provided for" more suitably.<sup>4</sup> Every politician who contributed to the annuity was under the deepest obligation to him for having driven the king's favourite from office; and since he had been

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 57-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Public Advertiser*, April 16, May 12, 1763; June 21, 1771; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 85; *Catalogue of Satirical Prints in British Museum*, iv. 266-7; Wilkes's Marginalia in *History of Late Minority* (Brit. Mus.), p. 400; *Life of Malone*, James Prior, p. 362; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, i. 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MSS. 30,868, f. 199; 30,869, f. 61; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, ii. 53, 204, 210, 214, 232; *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), vi. 316; *Public Advertiser*, June 29, 1771, *vide* letter from "Menenius," p. 174, *ante*.

<sup>4</sup> Add. MSS. 30,868, f. 212; 30,869, f. 6.

expelled from Parliament with the result of bankruptcy, in consequence of his service to the party as a pamphleteer the leaders were bound in common gratitude to assist him.

The career of John Wilkes as a demagogue naturally is divided into two periods. The first, which began with his arrest under a General Warrant in 1763, extended until his return from exile in 1768, while the second included the whole turmoil of the Middlesex election. Whatever may have been his venalities during the first period, or previous to it (and there is no proof of any save in regard to the Governorship of Canada), he was absolutely incorruptible afterwards. As soon as he had commenced his second crusade neither bribes nor threats would turn him from it.

When he obtained the support of the freeholders of the county all his desire for a foreign embassy faded away. It was now part of his creed that he would accept no place of profit under the Government, and he never faltered in his resolution. Although he knew that he would be allowed to retain his seat in Parliament if he bore his punishment quietly, he insisted upon presenting a petition to the House of Commons for the redress of his grievances.<sup>1</sup> While aware that he was forfeiting all chances of a pardon, he continued to attack the ministers at every opportunity. Certainly it was evident to both Lord North and the Duke of Grafton that Wilkes was neither to be bought nor sold.

There was no dishonour in allowing the Supporters of the Bill of Rights to pay his debts. Their help was thrust upon him voluntarily, for every patriot perceived that the cause must suffer unless their leader was rescued from bankruptcy. A much larger fund was contributed by the admirers of Cobden for a similar purpose. Although prodigal in money matters Wilkes does not appear to have been corrupt. When he went over to the Tories he received

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 35,608, f. 286; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 295; *Biographical and Political Anecdotes*, J. Almon, i. 8.

no pension, like Burke, as a reward of his adherence, but had he been "always in the market" he might have made an excellent bargain as the price of his apostasy a few years previously. It was not until he was comparatively an old man, when his political value could not have been worth the smallest of clerkships, that at last he was "provided for," and then the recompense for his brave struggle on behalf of liberty came neither from the Whig nor from the Tory party, but was given to him by the generous citizens of London. Since he is incomparably the greatest of the Lord Mayors he cannot be deemed to have been unworthy of the post of Chamberlain.

## VI

It has been the tendency of modern criticism, even when it takes a low estimate of Wilkes's character, to suggest that his prosecution for the two libellous publications was an act of tyranny. In the endeavour to show that he was the victim of persecution the temptation to vilify the ministers of George the Third, apparently is a more powerful motive than the desire to whitewash the pamphleteer. Yet an examination of the charges against him scarcely seem to prove that he was an innocent victim, and it is improbable that he would have escaped punishment in the present day. The libels for which he was sentenced are, however, only incidents in his career, important no doubt as a revelation of his moral character, but of small account in regard to the great achievements of his life.

The "Essay on Woman," which Wilkes was always careful to style "a ludicrous poem," cannot be defended by anyone who has read it.<sup>1</sup> The offence of printing a limited

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 82; *The North Briton*, W. Bingley, vol. i., Part I, p. xlviii.

edition was just as disgraceful as the actual authorship.<sup>1</sup> Wisely preferring that the matter should be forgotten as soon as possible he made only one public explanation with regard to it, an explanation, nevertheless, wholly inadequate and misleading.<sup>2</sup> The scandalous charge, inserted in the frontispiece, alleging that Archbishop Stone and Lord George Sackville were guilty of a crime that merited capital punishment, would have rendered the publisher liable to a prosecution for criminal libel if one copy only had been circulated, and the imputation was repeated still more grossly in the "Advertisement by the Editor." On the last page of the brief introduction, styled "The Design," there was a reference to the wife of the Bishop of Gloucester that is almost equally infamous.<sup>3</sup>

It is unnecessary to seek for further evidence of guilt in the poem itself or in the accompanying parodies. The subject-matter of the preliminary pages, apart from the obscenity and blasphemy of the rest, exposed the publisher to a heavy penalty, and that it was to be printed privately, and only twelve copies struck off, did not alter the fact that it was a libel in the eyes of the law. Since it was already in type the intention of publishing was manifest, and had the authorities waited until it had been circulated instead of using contemptible means to obtain a proof-sheet no objection could have been taken to their action. As it had been exhibited to his journeymen he was found guilty both of "printing and publishing," a verdict that would be returned under similar circumstances at the present day.<sup>4</sup> Being a criminal libel the sentence of

<sup>1</sup> *Ladies Fair and Frail*, H. Bleackley, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 112-15; *Gentleman's Magazine* (1764), p. 583.

<sup>3</sup> "An Essay on Woman" (London, 1871), pp. 4, 6, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Crown Rolls, King's Bench, Public Record Office, Roll 248, No. 76; *Howell's State Trials*, xix. 1124; *The Law of Objectionable Defamation*, G. S. Bower pp. 1-2.



twelve months' imprisonment does not seem to have been an excessive one.

Nor was "No. 45" the "very innocent paper" that he declared it to be. Although he endeavoured to justify his strictures by the sound constitutional axiom that "the King's Speech has always been regarded as the Speech of the Minister," the Sovereign rather than the Premier was unmistakably the object of his tirade. In spite of cunning phraseology the insinuation that the king was responsible for the falsehoods in the Speech from the Throne is manifest throughout the article, George being accused also of having sacrificed the honour of the Crown.<sup>1</sup> No English newspaper in modern times has ventured to attack the monarch in such unmeasured language, and if any did so it would be compelled to apologise and retract under threat of prosecution. Whatever may have been his faults George the Third was never lacking in courage and decision, and when he realised that the enemy, who had been publishing lampoons for so long with impunity, was at last delivered into his hands, it would have been wholly inconsistent with his principles not to have made an example of him. And Wilkes, who was well aware of the risks he ran in committing the offence of *lèse majesté*, does not seem to deserve the crown of martyrdom.

## VII

Unhappily for his fame as an author most of Wilkes's writings are of ephemeral interest, and are scarcely intelligible to posterity. Indeed of all the mighty army of political essayists there are only perhaps Swift, Junius, Burke, and Cobbett whose works have any permanent value. Moreover the pamphlets of the first are read mainly out of respect for his genius, those of the second

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton*, J. Williams, 1763, ii, 228-40.

for the sake of his style, and those of the last by the historical student in quest of information. Burke alone, an exception to every rule, is studied with delight both on account of his manner and his matter. It is a hard test to place Wilkes in such illustrious company, especially as his writings are of less general interest than the others.

Obviously he takes a far lower rank than either of his contemporaries. He had none of the power of reason, the deep political wisdom, and the vast resources of imagination that distinguish the works of Burke. He did not possess the dignified restraint that gives to the utterances of Junius their oracular effect, and little of his force of invective and glittering sarcasm. But with the exception of these he takes rank below no other political writer of his time. His style at its best is admirable, clear, and lucid as the verse of Pope, the meaning never in the least ambiguous. He had the knack, as exemplified in his portraits of Bute and Pitt, of presenting a vivid character-sketch in a few brief sentences, and sound common sense is shown in all his opinions. Most of his publications reveal a knowledge and sagacity in public affairs that none but a high intelligence could possess.

It is his misfortune, however, that he is never the chief spokesman, like Swift or like Burke, on a great occasion. As an apology for the elder Pitt the "Observations on the Papers relative to the Rupture with Spain" appear superfluous, since a more satisfactory defence of the foreign policy of the great commoner is found in the utterances of the statesman himself.<sup>1</sup> Likewise his "Letter to the Duke of Grafton" is eclipsed entirely by the two famous letters of Junius to the same nobleman.<sup>2</sup> The celebrated letter "to the worthy electors of the borough of Aylesbury" was

<sup>1</sup> *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers in the Case of John Wilkes* (Paris, 1767), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 184.

merely an attempted vindication of "No. 45" and the "Essay on Woman," not a very honourable task, nor did he show much regard to truth in the performance of it.<sup>1</sup> One of the best of his literary productions is the Dedication prefixed to the *Fall of Mortimer*, in which his wit and sarcasm reach a high level, but this after all is no more than a coarse lampoon at the expense of Bute and the king's mother.<sup>2</sup>

The publication of *The North Briton*, occurring at a momentous epoch in the nation's history, gave him a much better opportunity. But although the papers that he wrote for his famous periodical, which can be identified by the aid of his letters to Churchill, are far more brilliant and more sane than those of his collaborator, it is not the best literature of which he was capable.<sup>3</sup> Few of them reach a high level of dignity, most betray evidence of careless composition, and nearly all deal in mean scurrilities which are only tolerable when tempered by the fine irony of Junius.

Being a skilful author Wilkes wrote admirable letters, some of the most well known, as well as the best, being appropriately written to his daughter, and had they been composed with a view to publication they might have held a permanent place in literature. As a historian, however, judging from the "Introduction to the History of England," he had no qualifications whatever, the subject-matter being worthless, and even his clear and graceful style becomes puerile and obscure when he attempts to describe the infamies of the Stuarts and the nobility of the principles of the revolution.<sup>4</sup> It is remarkable that one who could write so well has left so little that survives. On the whole it seems probable that the fragment of auto-

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers* (Paris, 1767), p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Add. MSS. 30,878 *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 161.

biography that has escaped destruction is the work by which he will be best remembered.<sup>1</sup>

As was the fashion of the time Wilkes had a great fondness for *vers de société*. On several occasions, on the 16th of August he composed a Birthday Ode in honour of his beloved Polly, some of which have been preserved in the pages of *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*. One of the shortest, and therefore one of the best, was addressed to Miss Wilkes in the year 1777 :

“ The noblest gift you could receive,  
The noblest gift this day I'd give ;  
A father's heart I would bestow  
But that you stole it long ago.”<sup>2</sup>

A pretty young lady once whispered to him in a crowd in the Assembly Rooms at Bath : “ I can't bear to be so squeezed by people one does not know.”

In due course the merry wag replied in the following “ impromptu ” :

“ With spirit lovely Lydia cries,  
Sly Cupid basking in her eyes,  
' I can't bear the creatures who thus press and shove ;  
No—let me be press'd by the man that I love.’ ”<sup>3</sup>

The rest of Wilkes's poetical attempts were no better and very little worse than these examples. As a writer of poetry he was probably on the same level as Horace Walpole or Lady Temple, and his poems were worthy of a place in Lady Miller's vase at Bath-Easton.

<sup>1</sup> *John Wilkes : An Unfinished Autobiography* (Harrow, 1888) ; Add. MS. 30.865. This book, which is now very scarce, should be republished under the supervision of a capable editor.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit* (1784), i. 389.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 200 ; ii. 194-5.

## VIII

" John Wilkes he was for Middlesex,  
 They made him a Knight of the Shire ;  
 And he made a fool of Alderman Bull,  
 And he call'd Parson Horne a liar."

—*Old Song.*

In many respects a demagogue is frequently somewhat of a humbug. Since he makes his appeal to the most ignorant minds and to the lowest intelligences it is inevitable, if he has a sense of humour, that he should often feel contempt for his followers. Occasionally, too, especially if he achieves a great success, he will be apt to regard his own personality as of greater importance than the cause that he advocates. Though he may be perfectly sincere he has lapses of enthusiasm, like the rest of public men, and such lapses will be all the more noticeable in his case because at other times he scintillates at a white heat. While he may profess that "the voice of the people is the voice of God," he will desire, if he is a man of prudence, to interpret the pronouncements of the deity as he chooses, which all efficient prophets have done since the dawn of history. Having both a very human and a very humorous personality John Wilkes possessed all these frailties in full measure, and moreover, as already seen, he loved to make a pose of his insincerity.<sup>1</sup>

A well-known story illustrates contemporary opinion with regard to his honesty of purpose. One afternoon he told the Speaker in private that he had to deliver a petition to the House from "a set of the greatest scoundrels on earth." Being called upon to present it shortly afterwards he rose in his place with the utmost gravity.

"Sir," he announced, "I hold in my hand a petition

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance Littéraire* . . . par Jean François de la Harpe, t. 197.

from a most intelligent, independent, and enlightened body of men." <sup>1</sup>

But although he could not help despising the rabble that made him their idol it does not follow that he was untrue to the cause of liberty. The story of the petition obviously refers to a late period in his public career when he had ceased to be a Wilkite. Without any doubt, too, he always had a contempt for the House of Commons, which explains his attitude on so many occasions.

"Be as impudent as you can," was his advice to members of the parliamentary bar, "and say what comes uppermost in your mind. Jack Lee is the best heard of any counsel and he is always abusing us." <sup>2</sup>

Henry Addington, the Speaker, once overheard a conversation in the lobby between Wilkes and Major Scott, when the latter had come under the ban of the House of Commons.

"I give you joy," exclaimed the ex-patriot; "I am glad to see you in full dress. It is an occasion on which a man should appear to the best advantage."

"Joy! What do you mean?" replied Scott. "Why, I am here to be reprimanded."

"Exactly, and therefore I congratulate you," said Wilkes. "When the Speaker has finished abuse them all confoundedly, and then you will be sent to Newgate or to the Tower, and then you can be member for Middlesex or Westminster, whichever you like." <sup>3</sup>

The sublime egotism of the man often gave the impression that he was playing for his own hand. On one occasion he and one of his satellites issued a proclamation beginning "We, the people of England," and concluding "by order of the meeting." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Sidmouth*, George Pellew, i. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 224.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Lord Sidmouth*, G. Pellew, i. 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Old and New London*, E. Walford, i. 411.

In jest, too, he was not afraid of boasting of his mendacity.

"Give me a grain of truth," he used to say, "and I will mix it up with a great mass of falsehood, so that no chemist shall ever be able to separate them."<sup>1</sup>

It is unfair, however, to judge a great humorist, like Wilkes, out of his own mouth. All through his life he seemed to base his conduct upon the Horatian adage "*Quamquam ridentem dicere verum quid vetat?*" smiling invariably when he was expected to be serious. Such demeanour was often only a disguise to make his utterances more oracular and paradoxical. In spite of his quips and cranks he was sincere and honest enough in all the great events of his adventurous career. During the whole of his long warfare with Parliament he was as much in earnest as any man who has ever fought for freedom, displaying often enough the obvious faults of the demagogue, but remaining always a true "friend of liberty." There is no evidence that disillusionment came to him until the close of the American War.

## IX

To morality, of course, he made no pretence, rejoicing on the contrary in his reputation as a profligate. But even in this respect his iniquities have been exaggerated by assiduous enemies, and it is necessary to be acquainted with the full extent of his depravity in order to form a just estimate of his character. As shown in the preceding pages, he was a man of many mistresses, being unable to practise continence or obtain a divorce. It was his boast that he "loved all women except his wife."<sup>2</sup> Even though it may be impossible to agree with such a tolerant friend as Thomas Hollis, who regarded "the irregularities of Wilkes

<sup>1</sup> *Diary of Crabb Robinson*, iii. 210.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance Littéraire* . . . par J.-F. de La Harpe, i. 198.

as spots on the sun," one cannot stigmatise him on this account, as many have done, a worthless scoundrel.<sup>1</sup> If none were to be ranked among the immortals who had broken the seventh commandment Olympus would be sadly depopulated.

When scarcely more than thirty years of age he had already earned the reputation for immorality that deservedly clung to him through life.<sup>2</sup> No sooner had he become famous than it was possible for his enemies to point to him as one of the most dissolute men of the age. His connection with the Medmenham monks was already notorious.<sup>3</sup> The "Essay on Woman" was considered by all but obstinate admirers as "the most blasphemous and indecent poem that was ever composed."<sup>4</sup> His ugly countenance, vilified by Hogarth's caricature, was regarded as the index of his soul.

In spite of his plain features he received much encouragement from women. The amour with Mrs. Stafford and the innumerable references in his correspondence to persistent fair ones are instances of the real temptations that fell in his way. Being endowed with a "warm imagination"—to use his own euphemistic expression—he could not resist the opportunities of posing as a lion among the ladies, which await all popular heroes at the height of their fame. Except, however, in the case of Mrs. Barnard none of his liaisons seem to have been with women of position, indicating that, although many were proud to be seen to flirt with the distinguished patriot, few were disposed to exceed the limits of philandering.<sup>5</sup> It is evident, too, that Wilkes required obvious provocation before he ventured to drop the handkerchief. Still, the history of his amours is a long and unedifying one, and though it is certainly an

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis*, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* Potter's Letter, Add. MS. 30,867, f. 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Advertiser*, May 25, 1763.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), v. 387.

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 54, 60, 64, 66, 194.



error to imagine him, which many have done, as heartless and insatiable as Casanova, he was an avowed libertine both in principle and in practice.

To his wife he was both faithless and disloyal, avowing publicly that she was "perhaps the woman in the world most unfit for him," and taking an early opportunity of deserting her.<sup>1</sup> It is a poor excuse for such conduct to plead as he did that she was "half as old again" as himself when he married her, or to suggest incompatibility of temper. There is a much better excuse for him. Although Mrs. Wilkes had the reputation of being a good woman, her maternal affection appears to have fallen far short of her piety, for, while the husband was a devoted father, the wife was one of the most callous and apathetic of mothers.<sup>2</sup> A lady who was never able to win the love and confidence of such a daughter as Polly Wilkes could not have been altogether sound at heart.

It was the fashion to look upon Wilkes as one of the most profane men of the day, and many of his contemporaries have borne witness that his conversation was interlarded with blasphemy. Jests upon sacred things were tabooed in his time by all devout Christians, and the modern clerical humorist would have been regarded as an absolute pagan. After making all allowance for squeamishness, there can be no doubt that the demagogue deserved his reputation. His "Description of Medmenham Abbey" and the notes in the "Essay on Woman" prove to what extent he has cast ridicule upon religion.<sup>3</sup> Of the scriptural jokes contained in his letters to his daughter there is little, however, to shock the ears of piety.<sup>4</sup> Being also one of the most tactful of men when he chose to be, he seems to have tempered the keenness of his wit to the susceptibilities of his audience, never alienating any of his

<sup>1</sup> *The North Briton* (W. Bingley), vol. i., Part I, p. lxxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Wilkes to Dell, April 26, 1757 (Hartwell MSS.).

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to and from Mr. Wilkes* (1769), pp. 17-20.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 47, 148, 180-1.

numerous clerical acquaintances, like his Scottish friends, by the offensiveness of his sarcasm. Likely enough this partiality for blasphemy was merely a form of horseplay, since he appears to have been aware, as his speeches in Parliament indicate, that those who venture to insult the religion of others are only justified by the most honourable motives.<sup>1</sup>

It is often supposed that Wilkes was an agnostic, although there is no conclusive testimony. Probably his profane conversion was responsible for the popular impression. No doubt, his ostentatious attendance at church in most instances was for the sake of appearance, but, on the other hand, there was a strong vein of superstition in his temperament, which renders it improbable that he was a convert to rationalism.<sup>2</sup> Several of his speeches in Parliament seem to reveal a deep religious feeling. His famous declaration that *religion* was as ridiculous in his mouth as *liberty* in the mouth of Dr. Johnson was merely a proof that he realised what people thought of him.<sup>3</sup> While no priest seems to have come to shrive him at the end there were clergymen like Dr. Warton and Mr. Hewson of Shanklin who were his friends to the last, and these would not have been intimate with an avowed infidel. It is certain, however, that public opinion persisted in regarding him as a free-thinker, the newspapers making his impiety a frequent subject of jest even when he was an old man.<sup>4</sup>

There were many admirable traits in Wilkes's character.

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches of Mr. Wilkes*, pp. 323-43; cf. *Reminiscences of C. Butler*, i. 73; *The Sexagenarian*, W. Beloe, ii. 9; *Life of Hannah More*, iii. 56; *Letters of Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Montagu*, iii. 53; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Grenville Papers*, ii. 249; Add. MS. 30,867, f. 249; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 98, iii. 209; *Political Register*, ii. 410; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, iii. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, G. B. Hill, iii. 224.

<sup>4</sup> *The World*, Aug. 13, 18, 23, 25, 28, 30; Sept. 11, 12, 28, 29, 1787; July 28, 1789. Cf. *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, ii. 113, iii. 261, for references to the Deity.

During his long contest with Parliament he believed unquestionably that he was suffering for the sake of a cause, and he bore his long persecution with splendid patience.<sup>1</sup> Almost every incident of his life shows that he possessed an indomitable courage, which neither shrank from the violence of a bully nor was dismayed by the threats of a tyrant. Hardships failed to sour him, or even to depress his high spirits. Enemies agreed that he was a man of his word, and, setting aside his habit of writing vituperative paragraphs in the newspapers—in which he merely imitated his opponents—there was little that was mean or paltry in his methods, all his great battles being fought fairly and squarely in the open.<sup>2</sup> In an age of drunkenness he set an example of sobriety, and at an epoch when high play was a fashionable vice he was not afraid to denounce gambling.<sup>3</sup> Although a fastidious epicure he was by no means a *gourmand*. It is curious to note that he was one of the first to introduce the custom of having one dish only at a time on the table instead of the customary plethora.<sup>4</sup>

In temperament he was an aristocrat, as was quite compatible with his early training in "the principles of the Revolution," and his youthful association with the great distillery where his father ruled in feudal style over a little colony of vassals.<sup>5</sup> Despite his bourgeois origin he had no difficulty in forcing his way into county society when he became lord of the manor of Aylesbury, which, considering the hindrance that his wife must have been to him, is one of the most convincing proofs of his power of fascination. In contemporary memoirs there is unanimous corrobora-

<sup>1</sup> *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 476.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Sketches*, Henry, Lord Brougham (3rd series), p. 190; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 146; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 140, ii. 107, 217, iii. 208; *Literary Anecdotes*, J. Nichols, ix. 477 n. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *History of Buckinghamshire*, G. Lipscomb, ii. 40; *Rems. of H. Angelo* (1904), i. 45-6; *European Magazine*, xxxiii. 229; *Life of Frederick Reynolds*, i. 21, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Reminiscences of Charles Butler*, i. 73.

tion of the verdict of George the Third with regard to Wilkes's charm and politeness. Naturally, he was not a little vain of his immense renown, and there are many humorous instances of the "guid conceit" that was one of his most valuable credentials.<sup>1</sup> Although failing to make any mark in a parliamentary debate he was in his element as a popular speaker, many of his mob orations, too, being of necessity quite extempore. Whenever at a loss for language it was his habit to bawl out some familiar catchword.<sup>2</sup>

Being associated with several events of historical importance it is impossible that the memory of Wilkes can pass into oblivion like that of some of his contemporaries who were placed on a far higher plane during their lives. It is probable indeed that his fame, which has gone through such strange fluctuations while he lived and also since his death, will be established on a surer foundation in the immediate future. The biographies of the most prominent statesmen of his time—such as Chatham, Mansfield, Shelburne, North, and Burke—all of which must be re-written in the light of modern research, are bound to shed a reflected lustre upon the great patriot, whether their authors are impartial, laudatory or censorious.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to imagine that he can be more thoroughly aspersed than he has been in the past, and now that the worst is known of him there is little opportunity for the display of imagination. Hitherto he does not seem to have been given too high a place in history.

## X

No man ever inspired warmer friendships than John Wilkes. No man ever quarrelled more frequently with his

<sup>1</sup> e.g. *Swallowfield and Its Owners*, Constance, Lady Russell, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> *Reminiscences of Frederick Reynolds*, ii. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Vide *Lord North*, Reginald Lucas, i. 76-109, ii. 42, 56, 174. *Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham*, Basil Williams, i. 201, 255, ii. 6, 145, 155-6, 161, 163-7, 169, 203, 249-53, 268, 277. These recent biographies are a proof of the statement made above.

comrades. With the exception of John Churchill and Dr. Wilson there are none that remained on intimate terms with him during the whole of his political career. Both John Armstrong and Humphrey Cotes, who had loved him like a brother, fell out with him at last. George Onslow, William Fitzherbert, and Lauchlin Maclean, to whom he was under the deepest obligations, all turned from him in the end. Parson Horne and his city friends, after making him their idol, became his bitterest foes. The great Chatham, who once had delighted in his society, made the fiercest attack that was ever levelled against him.

It does not follow that he was invariably in the wrong. Most of these animosities were political, and the life of the parliamentarian imposes the severest strain upon all friendship. In the fierce progress of Wilkes's tempestuous career it was inevitable that many old ties should be broken. There is no doubt, however, that he was a vexatious colleague. Often enough he was both "irritable and passionate," while it was notorious that when once he had made up his mind nothing would turn him from his purpose.<sup>1</sup> And whenever a breach occurred he had no mercy upon a former friend, attacking him with the utmost ferocity.

Yet at the same time, he bore no malice against his worst enemy, being wholly without rancour, and never influenced by any mean desire for revenge. For 'Lord Sandwich he had always a partiality notwithstanding their great feud.' To Lord Mansfield, who had been the judge at his trial, he presented a copy of his *Theophrastus*.<sup>2</sup> Although Lord Chatham had called him a "libeller" and a "blasphemer," he had the utmost reverence for the great statesman to the end of his days.<sup>3</sup> During the illness of the king, no one

<sup>1</sup> *Records of My Life*, J. Taylor, i. 110; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Reminiscences of C. Butler*, i. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iv. 232; *Letters of Wilkes to his Daughter*, i. 163.

<sup>4</sup> *Anecdotes of Lord Chatham* (J. Almon, 1810), iii. 362.

was more grieved, as his letters show, than "that devil Wilkes," who a few years previously had told Junius that he *hated* the man.<sup>1</sup> At the general election of 1790 he went out of his way to vote for Parson Horne when it would have been better for his interests had he abstained.<sup>2</sup> Few men in public life have shown so much benevolence and kindly tolerance in sweeping aside old animosities.

Often enough the provocation came, or must have seemed to come, from the friend himself. There is no doubt that Wilkes had good reason for believing that Onslow and Fitzherbert, in spite of their professions of regard, began to grow lukewarm in his interests directly they obtained office. Although Chatham, in all probability, was not guilty of the meanness of delivering his famous denunciation out of a desire to conciliate the king, Wilkes certainly had cause to feel aggrieved that his old leader did not speak a word in his favour until his imprisonment was over and he was free to wield his great power.<sup>3</sup> In his opinion, too, Horne, Townsend, and Oliver appeared no doubt to be actuated by the basest envy. Quarrels with his own allies were inevitable, since he always considered that the Whigs had behaved to him with gross ingratitude. Certainly no man has ever done so much for his party who has received such a small reward.

Some of Wilkes's enmities were caused, as in the case of Lauchlin Maclean, by his neglect to refund the money which he had borrowed; others, like that of Dr. Armstrong and Smollett, were the result of his attacks upon the Scots.<sup>4</sup> Most of them, too, occurred during his middle age. As he advanced in years and the fierce passions that he had aroused began to die away these frequent squabbles ceased entirely.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Junius* (Bohn, 1908), ii. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,895, f. 92; *Life of Sheridan*, T. Moore, ii. 120.

<sup>3</sup> *The Beautiful Lady Craven*, A. M. Broadley and L. Melville, ii. 152-3; *Papers of a Critic*, C. W. Dilke, ii. 250-3.

<sup>4</sup> Add. MSS. 30,869, f. 29; 30,871, ff. 56, 57.

All through his life he was somewhat exacting towards his intimates, loving to have a docile satellite at his command, like Dell, Cotes, Suard, or William Sharpe, but he was inclined occasionally to forget the services that they had rendered as soon as they were of no more use to him. Probably such cases were the result of forgetfulness rather than ingratitude, for he was not as a rule unmindful of old acquaintances. It has been recorded by the biographer of his most bitter enemy that "he cheered the deathbed of Lloyd by means of his bounty; and after burying Churchill at his own expense, erected an appropriate monument to his memory."<sup>1</sup> It is unlikely that a man who was a good son and the most devoted of fathers could have been a bad friend.

It is easy to imagine the vicissitudes of his relationship with one of his old comrades such as James Townsend; the enthusiasm with which such a man would welcome the advent of the great patriot; how he would accept him with pride as his leader, full of admiration for his courage and sagacity, delighting in his wit and high spirits. The inevitable quarrel when two masterful temperaments came into collision, and the pain and indignation of the colleague when he realised that the implacable Wilkes was determined to allow no armistice and give no quarter, for every blow returning ten. Yet after years of the fiercest animosity the demagogue would harbour no resentment when once the contest was over, ever ready to meet his enemy with a cheery smile and a warm grip of the hand, effecting a reconciliation sooner or later with the dourest of foes. Although it might be difficult to forget the injury, the charm of the man made it always easy to forgive him, and when it was remembered that his combativeness was the result of the hard battle in which he was constantly engaged, the memory of his offence could not have been such a bitter one after all. Thus, in the sunset of his life

<sup>1</sup> *Life of J. Horne Tooke*, A. Stephens, ii. 233.

he was surrounded by kindly faces, and many who disapproved of his vices were pleased to believe that they were counterbalanced by his virtues, feeling a sincere affection for the brave old patriot who had fought such a good fight, and proud to reckon him their friend.





## APPENDIX I

### THE AUTHORSHIP OF "AN ESSAY ON WOMAN"

**M**ORE than fifty years ago Mr. C. W. Dilke endeavoured to prove that Wilkes did not write the "Essay on Woman," and since the publication of his celebrated apologia there has been scarcely an attempt to challenge his conclusions.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Mr. H. S. Ashbee, who seems to have written the introduction to Hotten's edition of the poem, no one has dared to fix the guilt upon the member for Aylesbury.<sup>2</sup> Most modern critics have taken it for granted that Potter was the sole author, or that Wilkes, at any rate, only acted as a collaborator.

There is some evidence in favour of his innocence. At the time of his trial he was anxious, for obvious reasons, to create the impression that the poem had been written by his friend, and in the notes upon the case, prepared by Philipps, the lawyer, for the instruction of counsel, there was an emphatic statement to this effect. "It is a ~~circum~~ circumstance almost of universal notoriety that the 'Essay on Woman' is a parody of Pope's 'Essay on Man,' wrote about fifteen years ago by Mr. Potter, son of the late Archbishop of Canterbury."<sup>3</sup>

Evidently many of his friends accepted this explanation. Captain Edward Thompson, who was a bosom friend of both Wilkes and Churchill and, being a ribald poet himself,

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, iv. 1-2, 21-2, 41-3. *Papers of a Critic*, 11. 229-79. Since this was written Mr. Eric R. Watson's admirable articles have been published in *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, ix. 121 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> "An Essay on Woman and other pieces" (London). Privately printed, September, 1871. [J. C. Hotten.]

<sup>3</sup> Add. MSS. 30,885, f. 155.

likely to be in their confidence, has left a written declaration that the poem was not composed by the patriot.<sup>1</sup> There is a manuscript note also in a printed copy of the "Essay on Woman," in the handwriting of the late Alexander Dyce, which says: "My late venerable friend, William Maltby, was intimately acquainted with Wilkes, and assured me that Wilkes said to him, 'I am not the author of the "Essay on Woman"; it was written by Potter.'" <sup>2</sup> Horace Walpole, however, always well informed in such a matter, obviously believed that the two friends had written the poem in collaboration.<sup>3</sup>

The evidence of his guilt is much more conclusive, for by collecting his public and private declarations on the subject one discovers that he has made a full confession. In his "Letter to the Electors of Aylesbury," dated from Paris on October 22, 1764, he enters into an elaborate, though not a very truthful, explanation. "I now proceed to the other charge brought against me, which respects an idle poem call'd an *Essay on Woman* and a few other detach'd verses. . . . I will always maintain the right of private opinion in its full extent, when it is not followed by any open, public offence to any establishment or indeed to any individual. . . . In my own closet I had a right to examine and even try by the keen edge of ridicule any opinions I pleas'd. If I have laugh'd pretty freely at the glaring absurdities of the most monstrous creed which was ever attempted to be imposed on the credulity of Christians, a creed which our great Tillotson wish'd the Church of England was fairly rid of, it was in private I laugh'd. I am not the first good protestant who has amus'd himself with the egregious nonsense . . . of that strange, perplex'd and perplexing mortal . . . Athanasius. I gave,

<sup>1</sup> *Poems of Paul Whitehead*, E. Thompson, p. xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* copy of "An Essay on Woman" in the Dyce Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of H. Walpole* (Toynbee), cv. 394; *Memoirs of the Reign of George III*, H. Walpole, i. 246.

however, no offence to any one individual of the community . . . a Stuart only cou'd make the refinement in tyranny of ransacking and robbing the recesses of closets and studies in order to convert *private amusements* into *state crimes*. . . . The neat, prim, smirking chaplain of that babe<sup>1</sup> of grace . . . the Earl of March, was highly offended at my having made an *essay on woman*. . . . He proceeded to make very unfair extracts. . . . The most vile blasphemies were forg'd and publish'd as part of a work which in reality contain'd nothing but fair ridicule on some doctrines I cou'd not believe . . . a few portraits drawn from warm life, with the too high colouring of a youthful fancy and two or three descriptions, perhaps too luscious, which tho' *Nature* and *Woman* might pardon a Kidgell and a Mansfield could not fail to condemn." <sup>1</sup>

In the "Letter to the Duke of Grafton," dated Paris on December 12, 1766, there is a still more obvious acknowledgment of his guilt. "Mr. Pitt had no doubt his views in even feeding me with flattery from time to time," he declared; "on occasions, too, where candour and indulgence" were all I cou'd claim. He may remember the compliments he paid me on *two* certain *poems* in the year 1754. If I were to take the declarations made by himself and the late Mr. Potter *à la lettre* they were more charm'd with those verses after the ninety-ninth reading than after the first. . . . I will now submit to your grace if there was not something peculiarly base and perfidious in Mr. Pitt's calling me a *blasphemer of my God* for those very verses at a time when I was absent and dangerously ill from an affair of honour. The charge, too, he knew to be false, for the whole ridicule of those two pieces was confined to certain mysteries which formerly the *unplac'd and unpension'd* Mr. Pitt did not think himself obliged to believe." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers in the Case of Mr. Wilkes* (Paris, 1767), pp. 132-6; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 112-16.

<sup>2</sup> *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers*, pp. 166-7; *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, iii. 191-2.

Undoubtedly it is the "Essay on Woman" that is here indicated, for it was in reference to this work that Pitt declared in a speech in the House of Commons on the Nov. 24, 1763, that Wilkes was "a blasphemer of his God."

A note from Thomas Potter, written to Wilkes from Bath on Oct. 27, 1754, corroborates the statement that Pitt was amused by Wilkes's poems.

"I have this moment read your parody for the ninety-ninth time," said the writer, "and have laughed as heartily as I did at the first. . . . At dinner yesterday we (*i.e.* Pitt and Potter) read over your Parody. He (Pitt) bid me tell you he found with great concern you was as wicked and agreeable as ever. I think you exceed yourself. I have made a few verbal amendments."<sup>1</sup>

Wilkes was always anxious to maintain that the "Essay on Woman" was one of the parodies that Pitt admired.

His brother Heaton was horrified at the apparent confession in the "Letter to the Duke of Grafton," and wrote at once to remonstrate.

"Let me wish two lines totally omitted . . ." he protested on the April 14, 1767, "I mean that part where you confess yourself the Author of the Essay on Woman. It can in no way raise your fame in friends' eyes and with enemies must give them an advantage over you."<sup>2</sup>

In his reply from Paris on April 22, 1767, Wilkes gave a full explanation of his motives.

"I studiously omitted such paw paw words as the *Essay on Woman* and the *Veni Creator*," said he, "but I could not omit so home a stroke at Chatham, nor could it be made without my being the author acknowledged as such and prov'd before the House of Lords. My defence on that point in the Letter to the Borough of Aylesbury is solid. *I never publish'd*, I never gave copies, etc. Even as a juvenile performance I only claim *candour* and *indulgence*."

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,869, f. 111.

No man has a right to enquire into my private amusements if they are not prejudicial to Society." <sup>1</sup>

Having been proved guilty of both printing and publishing the poem Wilkes seems to have imagined that he would incur no greater odium by acknowledging the authorship, especially as he regarded his defence as "solid," and the avowed object of the last confession was to attack Lord Chatham. Consequently one may be inclined to doubt whether it really was the "Essay on Woman" that the great statesman saw in 1754. From Potter's letter it would appear to have been a short parody that might be read many times over, possibly the "Veni Creator." Wilkes also speaks of *two poems*.

Another letter from Potter seems to show, moreover, that a year later the "Essay" was still unfinished.

"Who your Mrs. M. is with whom you rather wish me to — I am at a loss to guess," the barrister wrote to Wilkes from Exeter on July 31, 1755. "I could reverse the letter and attempt the Essay on Woman without even the hope of having a Commentator. They are a cursed race and often marr the text. Take notice I do not mean to censure your annotations. Thou art, no marr text. But you sometimes supply a text when without your assistance it would be defective." <sup>2</sup>

From these cryptic observations it would seem that the two friends were collaborating in the work. On his own confession Potter was in the habit of making "verbal amendments" in Wilkes's poems.<sup>3</sup> For these reasons I am inclined to think, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that he had some share in the composition, and that the pair may be regarded as joint authors, as a great number of their contemporaries believed them to be. In my opinion it would be unwise to acquit Potter entirely.

<sup>1</sup> Letter in MSS. sold at Sotheby's on Aug. 1, 1913, in possession of the author. (Never before published.)

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,880 B. f. 3. [Printed for the first time.]

<sup>3</sup> Add. MS. 30,867, f. 103.

Wilkes, nevertheless, must have put on the finishing touches, and brought the poem up to date. Originally composed in the early fifties,<sup>1</sup> its references to Peg Woffington, Fanny Murray, and "Hussey's Duchess" were somewhat out of date in the year 1762. The allusions to Sackville, to Hogarth, and to Lord Bute obviously were written at the later period when Potter was in his grave. One seems to trace the true Wilkes manner throughout the whole composition.

Much of the evidence that has been thought to point to Wilkes as the sole author cannot be regarded as conclusive. The testimony of Michael Curry, in his examination before the House of Lords on Nov. 15, 1763, to the effect that the MS. of the poem was in the handwriting of the member for Aylesbury, may be rejected as tainted, while it does not disprove that Potter may have given considerable help.<sup>2</sup> The letter of Wilkes to Dr. Brocklesby on Dec. 19, 1763, is too evasive and loose in its phraseology to constitute a confession of guilt.<sup>3</sup> The same argument applies to his letters to Kearsley of Oct. 14, Oct. 18, and Oct. 21, 1762 (the originals of which I found in the Wilkes MSS. at the Guildhall Library), for had he been editing an edition of Bunyan or Milton he might have spoken to his printer of "*my Pilgrim's Progress*" or "*my Paradise Lost*" just as he spoke of "*my Essay on Woman*."

Only ninety-four lines of the poem were printed, but it is certain that much more existed in manuscript, if indeed it was not entirely finished. According to Wilkes "not quite a *fourth part*" was set up in type, indicating that he had not published all that he had written.<sup>4</sup> On Feb. 15, 1764, he promised Humphrey Cotes that "as soon as I get time

<sup>1</sup> Between 1751-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Journals of the House of Lords*, xxx. 415-17; Curry's First Narrative in Add. MS. 22,132, f. 271; Guildhall MS., 214, 2, vol. i. *Vide* "A Genuine Account of the Proceeding against Mr. Wilkes."

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to and from Mr. Wilkes* (1769), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *A Complete Collection of Genuine Papers*, p. 134.

I will send you more of the Essay on Woman. How much have you already?"<sup>1</sup> On March 1 of the same year he boasted of "the little part" that the Government "have got" of the poem.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in his letter to Dr. Brocklesby on Dec. 19, 1763, he quoted from the nineteenth line of the *fourth* epistle of the "Essay on Woman."<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely too that he would have begun to print until the whole manuscript was ready.

Mr. H. S. Ashbee has pointed out that no copy can claim to be an original—that is, one of the original thirteen copies struck off at Wilkes's private press—unless it has certain characteristics.<sup>4</sup> It must answer in every particular to the bibliographical description given by Kidgell.<sup>5</sup> It must be a parody of Pope's "Essay on Man," almost line for line, *printed in red*. The frontispiece (a description of which has been given in Chapter VIII) must be engraved on copper, and decorated with a phallic emblem. It must contain all the passages alluded to by both Kidgell and Farmer.<sup>6</sup> The Frontispiece must be followed by "The Advertisement" and "The Design," page 1 to page 9 of the "Essay"; then a chasm to page 119 where begins "The Universal Prayer," which reaches to page 122; then "The Dying Lover," pp. 123-4, and "The Veni Creator" paraphrased, page 125.<sup>7</sup>

A reference to some of the documents dealing with Wilkes's trial enables us to reconstruct enough of the actual poem to determine which is a true version. At the Public Record Office there is a copy of the "Information" exhibited by Sir Fletcher Norton, Attorney-General, which

<sup>1</sup> Add. MS. 30,868, f. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Add. MS. 30,868, f. 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to and from Mr. Wilkes* (1769), p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, Pisanus Fraxi, pp. 198-236.

<sup>5</sup> "A Genuine and Succinct Narrative," Rev. Mr. Kidgell (Robson).

<sup>6</sup> *The Plain Truth*, Thomas Farmer, pp. 15-16.

<sup>7</sup> Add. MS. 30,885, f. 155. Mr. Watson points out further that an original edition must be of twenty-four pages octavo. *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, ix. 184.



contains innumerable extracts.<sup>1</sup> It shows that the "Essay" began with the lines:—"Awake, my Fanny, leave all meaner things. This morn shall prove what rapture —, brings." It quotes the notes, mentioned by Horace Walpole, about the Virgin Mary and the ass. It contains all the references mentioned by Kidgell and by Farmer. The same extracts are given in the Wilkes MSS. at the Guildhall Library and in "Alexander Philipp's Notes on the Case."<sup>2</sup> These documents confirm the conclusions of Mr. Ashbee, and prove that Hotten's edition, printed in 1871, and the copy in the Dyce Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum are genuine and complete copies from the original edition.<sup>3</sup>

All the original copies, printed at Wilkes's press, seem to have disappeared, though Mr. Ashbee declares that a copy existed till late in the nineteenth century. The original manuscript too has never yet been discovered.

So only ninety-four lines of the "Essay" are extant, and there is no evidence that any more of it was ever printed. At all events it is certain that Wilkes never made another attempt.

<sup>1</sup> Crown Roll, No. 248, Court of King's Bench.

<sup>2</sup> Guildhall MS. 214, 4; Add. MS. 30, 885, ff. 150-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, Pisanus Fraxi, pp. 198-236.

[An exhaustive paper entitled "John Wilkes and 'The Essay on Woman,'" written by Mr. Eric R. Watson, one of the most diligent and sagacious of historical biographers, has appeared recently in *Notes and Queries*, 11th series, ix. (14th Feb., 1914, *et seq.*). This is by far the most comprehensive monograph on the subject.]

## APPENDIX II

### JOHN WILKES'S AGE

THESE appears to be some doubt as to the exact age of Wilkes at the time of his death. On the tablet in Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street, it is said that he was born on October 17, 1727, O.S. Evidently the patriot himself believed, or wished others to believe, that this was the date of his birth, for in a letter to Horne, published in *The Public Advertiser*, May 23, 1771, he informed the world: "The city election was in March, 1768; I was *forty* the October preceding."<sup>1</sup> Still, although I have been unable to find his *acte de naissance*, I am inclined to believe that he was born two years earlier than he imagined.

The date given in the pedigree drawn up by Sir Sherston Baker is October 17, 1725. This agrees with the statement of Robert Gibbs that Wilkes was "not quite twenty-two when he married" on May 23, 1747, but controverts his own declaration to Mrs. Stafford on March 14, 1778: "In my *non-age* to please an indulgent father I married a woman half as old again as myself."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is stated distinctly in the licence granted at the Bishop of London's office that Wilkes was twenty-one years of age upwards at the time of his marriage, which would seem to put the question beyond doubt. Since he underrated his own age it is possible that he was exaggerating when he declared that his wife was ten years his senior.

There are other corroborations of the earlier date. On

<sup>1</sup> *The Controversial Letters of Wilkes and Horne* (1771), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Aylesbury*, R. Gibbs, p. 236; Add. MS. 30,880 B, f. 71.

October 30, 1769, it was announced in *The Public Advertiser*: "Saturday being the birthday of John Wilkes, who entered into the forty-fifth year of his age, the same was observed in most parts of the Metropolis and its environs with every testimony of joy." At the time of his death the *Morning Herald* declared that he was born in 1725, and the *Annual Register* confirmed this assertion by stating that he was in his seventy-third year.<sup>1</sup> After the new style was adopted his birthday, of course, was changed from October 17 to October 28, on which latter day it was always celebrated.

<sup>1</sup> *Morning Herald*, Dec. 30, 1797; *Annual Register* (1797), p. 378.

## APPENDIX III

### POLLY WILKES

THE devoted Polly survived her father less than five years. Her death came suddenly. On March 11, 1802, she entertained a party of friends at dinner, besides holding a large rout in the evening. Feeling unwell, she retired soon after midnight, and, becoming worse after reaching her room, was obliged to ring for assistance. A doctor was summoned, but in less than an hour she was dead. Her complaint was said to have been cramp in the stomach.<sup>1</sup>

The admirable Joseph Paice communicated the news to her friend, the Archbishop of Narbonne, in the following naïve epistle: "Most Venerable Lord, The excellent Miss Wilkes became Immortal at two o'clock. This happy change took place after being ill about an hour and a half."<sup>2</sup>

The residue of her property was left to her cousin, Lady Baker (*née* Dinah Hayley), but there were legacies to all her nearest relatives. In order to carry out her father's wishes she bequeathed £3400 to Harriet Wilkes and £2500 to Amelia Arnold. •

For several years before her death the affection of her throat had become chronic, and she could hardly make her voice heard. There is unanimous testimony that she was a woman of sweet disposition and charming manners, but all are agreed that she was very plain. Once a curious child asked Mr. Paice if Miss Wilkes was pretty. "Very

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wilkes*, J. Almon, v. 102; *Morning Post*, March 15, 1802, 4

<sup>2</sup> *The Jerningham Papers*, i. 206-8.

elegant, my love, extremely elegant," replied the charitable Joseph.<sup>1</sup>

Underneath her father's tablet in Grosvenor Chapel the following epitaph was inscribed :

" IN MEMORY OF MARY  
THE ACCOMPLISHED AND ONLY CHILD OF  
JOHN WILKES, ESQ. BY MARY HIS WIFE ;  
SHE ENDED A LIFE OF UNAFFECTED PIETY  
AND FILIAL AFFECTION ; MARCH 12, 1802  
ÆT. 53."

<sup>1</sup> *Family Pictures*, Anne Manning (1861), p. 52.





# ERRATA

- Page 21, line 21, *for* "fourteen" *read* "sixteen."
- " 26, line 16, *omit* "great."
- " 26, line 20, *omit* "a certain."
- " 40, line 2, *for* "intentions" *read* "intention."
- " 55, line 11, *for* "Wellbore" *read* "Welbore."
- " 69, line 28, *for* "any" *read* "one."
- " 69, line 33, *omit* "his."
- " 72, line 16, *for* "every Englishman" *read* "all Englishmen."
- " 109, line 2, *for* "subjects" *read* "subject."
- " 136, line 11, *for* "winter" *read* "winter's."
- " 139, line 6, *omit* "mere."
- " 140, line 26, *for* "Darby" *read* "Darly."
- " 161, line 1, *omit* "as."
- " 180, line 17, *omit* "most."
- " 181, line 28, *omit* "practically."
- " 185, line 12, *after* "Goodman's Fields" *insert footnote* : "Mrs. Hayley  
was Mary Wilkes, previously married to Samuel Storke,  
• now the wife of George Hayley."
- " 187, line 10, *for* "the Guildhall" *read* "Guildhall."
- " 211, note 1, *for* "Mead" *read* "Meade."
- " 217, last line, *for* "Townshend" *read* "Townsend."
- " 222, line 16, *for* "this hero" *read* "their hero."
- " 228, line 12, *for* "not" *read* "nor."
- " 241, line 10, *for* "election" *read* "representation."
- " 243, line 10, *for* "tower" *read* "Tower."
- " 275, line 7, *for* "leaders" *read* "friend."
- " 284, line 19, *for* "pendants" *read* "pennants."
- " 302, line 13, *for* "are" *read* "were."
- " 340, line 25, *for* "Jew bourgeois" *read* "bourgeois Jew."
- " 397, line 17, *for* "from the Guildhall" *read* "from Guildhall."
- " 397, line 23, *omit* "still."
- " 405, line 4, *for* "Apparently" *read* "Obviously."
- " 418, line 21, *for* "seem" *read* "seems."
- " 419, line 3, *for* "one public explanation" *read* "two public  
explanations."
- " 429, line 10, *for* "conversion" *read* "conversation."
- " 451, line 39, *for* "Darby" *read* "Darly."
- " 463, line 28, *insert* 194 *before* 254, 294 *before* 310.
- " 463, line 29, *insert* 380, 381, 384-385 *after* 376.
- " 463, line 33, *insert* 288 *before* 290.
- " 464, *for* "John" *read* "Mary."

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1792 ; died	Parliament
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**ABU SALAM ZIMADER**  
**Proprietor**